THE HISTORY AND WITNESS OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

ITS HISTORY AND WITNESS

A SERIES OF LECTURES DELIVERED AT MANSFIELD COLLEGE, OXFORD, IN THE HILARY TERM, 1911

EDITED BY

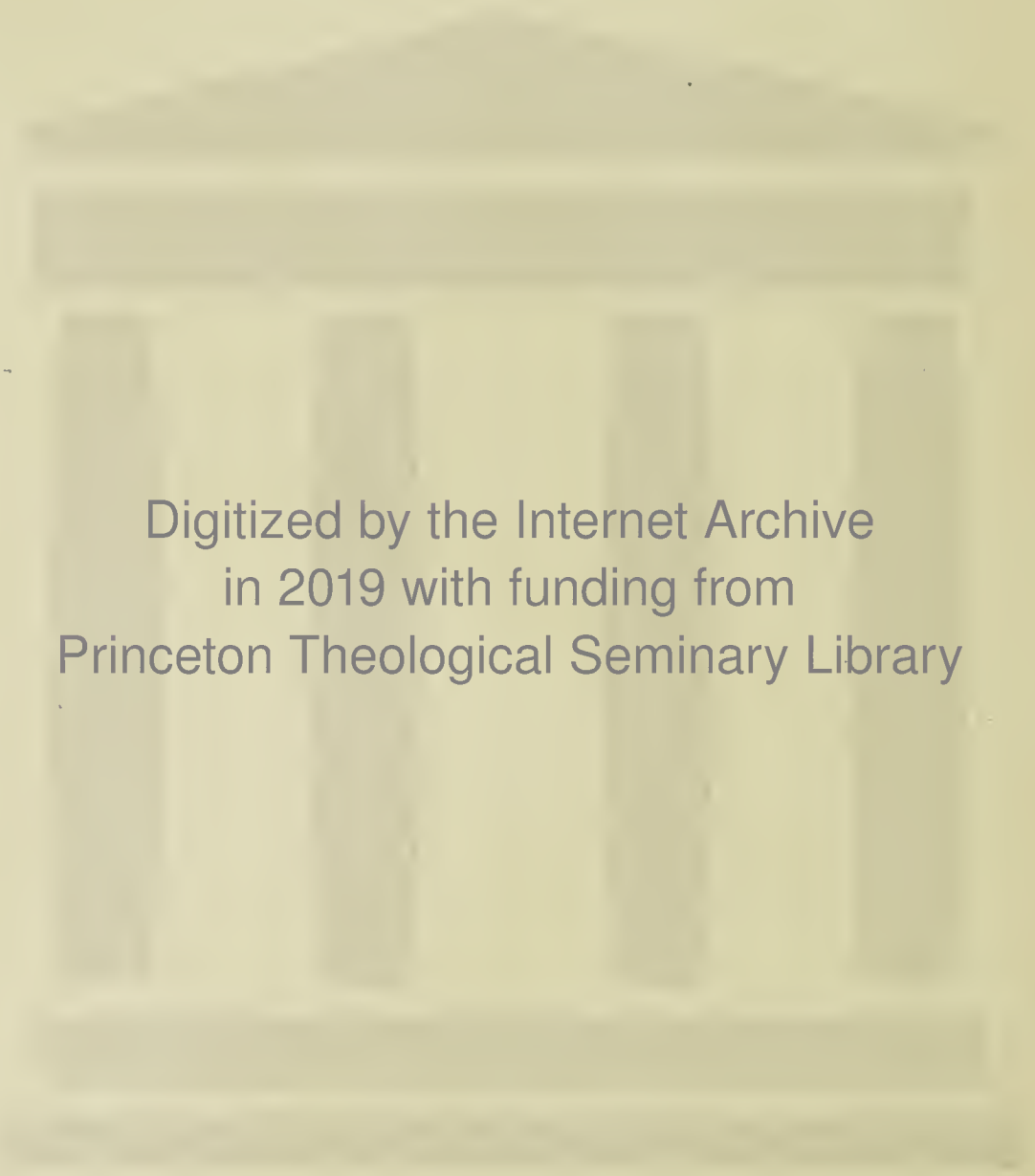
W. B. SELBIE, M.A., D.D.

PRINCIPAL OF MANSFIELD COLLEGE, OXFORD

AUTHOR OF "ASPECTS OF CHRIST" ETC.

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

NEW YORK AND LONDON



INTRODUCTION

THE genesis and purpose of the lectures in this volume will be found explained in the following statement, which was issued in the first instance to the lecturers themselves, and afterwards to those who were invited to hear the lectures delivered :—

"As sequel to a lecture on "The Positive Protestant Idea of Church and Ministry as rooted in Early Christianity," delivered last November in Mansfield College, a series of lectures will be given on the "Evangelical" idea of Christianity as unfolded in modern times in the history and present influence of various communions, differing in organisation but agreeing in their essential view of the Gospel and Church of Christ. By "Evangelical" is here meant that type of Christian life and truth which regards as primary and determinative, alike for the individual and for the Church, living faith in Christ as all-sufficient mediator of God's grace. That is, its emphasis falls upon the experimental and personal rather than the sacramental and institutional aspects of Christianity.

"The series will, it is hoped, furnish at once proofs

of spiritual unity amid formal variety and an impressive appeal to history and experience as authenticating "Evangelical" religion. The sphere of this appeal will be the English-speaking peoples, as affording a fairly homogeneous field of study. Further, as regards the various species of Church life dealt with, the aim will be to bring out the contribution of each to the common religious and moral life of the several national units, and of the larger whole which they jointly constitute. For this purpose it has been decided to include all the typical historic communions in which the "Evangelical" spirit has embodied itself, and to treat these as far as possible in the order of their emergence in our national history.

"The standpoint of the series is essentially positive and fraternal. But it should be easily understood that the various lecturers are not to be thought to approve all that is distinctive of any one communion whose providential place in the Kingdom of God and Church of Christ is yet gratefully recognised by those responsible for organising the lectures. Thus, for instance, they are not to be thought to regard as among things indifferent in themselves, still less in relation to the prospects of closer union among Christians, the special sacramental views or usages either of the Baptists or the Society of Friends. The latter may, indeed, by their spiritual record and witness be a standing object-lesson in the truth of the "Evangelical" theory of sacra-

mental grace, as being secondary to that conveyed through the Word of faith. Yet while this consideration goes to the root of the matter, it does not cover all that bears on the being and well-being of the visible Body of Christ.

"More and more it is felt among Churchmen of all types that no one existing order of ecclesiastical polity is complete in itself, and that the only hope of attaining the fulness of Christian life lies in a candid and sympathetic recognition of the positive truth committed to all the living communions of Christ's people. As a step to this end, this series of lectures is designed; and it is hoped that even those who belong to the opposite tradition to that termed "Evangelical" may recognise some value in it, at least as a necessary preliminary to the better mutual understanding through which alone reunion can ever be realised. Accordingly, the presence of "Catholics," no less than "Evangelicals"—to use for convenience terms which neither can wholly concede to the other save in a technical sense—will be heartily welcomed at these lectures."

This statement speaks for itself. But it may not be out of place here to indicate somewhat more in detail how far the lectures may be regarded as having fulfilled the hopes of their promoters, and the contribution they make towards the great question of Christian reunion. It is the growing importance of this question which led to their inception. In Oxford, as in other places, there are many Christian

people who regard the divisions of the Church with indifference, or who are quite hopeless as to the possibility of bringing about a better state of things. There are others, however, who are painfully alive to the shame and mischief of the present situation, and who see clearly that the Church of Christ must achieve some kind of unity amid diversity if she is ever to do her proper work, or meet the needs of the present age. They understand also that while the exigencies of modern life and thought are giving a new urgency to the problem, they are also providing certain elements necessary to its solution. Historical research is making it less and less possible for men to assume a tone of dogmatic assurance in regard to forms of Church government, and is providing an atmosphere in which those who differ on things ecclesiastical may find it more possible to understand one another.

The careful and sympathetic study of Church history shows how varieties in ecclesiastical form and doctrinal belief arose, not from superfluity of naughtiness and mere love of division, but from the conscientious convictions of good men under the stress of changes in time and circumstance. It shows, too, how many of the positions thus reached became themselves untenable and ceased to be. Others of them, however, had within them the elements of a more enduring life, and appealed to men and women in such a way as to become permanent vehicles of religious experience. Having

stood such a test, and possessing such a justification, they cannot be regarded as altogether outside the Providence and purpose of God. The narrowest judgment will suffer them all to grow together until the harvest, while a more sympathetic view will see in them the appointed means of meeting and satisfying the varied spiritual needs of men. For while men differ as they do in mental outlook and spiritual development, it will be quite impossible to secure a dead uniformity of religious worship or belief. It is possible even to make out a good case for our divisions, as having contributed effectively to the life and progress of the Christian Church. And they may still be made to do so, if it can be shown that they do not necessarily interfere with the real spiritual unity of Christendom. The only unity worth aiming at is one amid and compatible with diversity—a unity of faith, sentiment, experience, and devotion which shall be allowed to express itself in forms and organisations suited to varying degrees of temperament, mental culture, and spiritual progress. Under existing ecclesiastical conditions in the English-speaking world such a unity may be difficult of attainment, but ought not to be impossible. In many parts of the Mission field it exists already, and has resulted in fruitful co-operation. It only needs a better understanding of the causes and meaning of our differences, and a spirit of charity which is content to put first things first and all other things in their

proper places, to become more widespread and effective at home.

It is indeed true that the times seem to be ripe for a better spirit among the Churches. They need to stand together, both for the defence and propagation of the Gospel. The world outside cannot understand their divisions, and will never take their efforts seriously, unless they can show that they are really one in Christ Jesus. While this is no reason for abandoning positions conscientiously held, it is a reason for seeking better relations with those who are all aiming at the same goal, but seeking to reach it by different roads. It is in the earnest hope that it may serve as a contribution to this desired end that the present volume is issued.

W. B. SELBIE.

Mansfield College,
Oxford, *May* 1911.

CONTENTS

IV

V

VI

VII

THE PROTESTANT IDEA OF CHURCH AND MINISTRY AS ROOTED IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

BY

J. VERNON BARTLET, D.D.

1. The Protestant idea seen in its emphasis.
   Like emphasis marks Early Christianity.
   (*a*) Christ's own teaching as to the Church and the Apostolate: official authority and its delegation foreign thereto.
   (*b*) The evidence of Acts: apostolic leadership, no "apostolic succession" in office or grace.
   (*c*) The Pauline Epistles: the basis of ministry, *charismata*, or functions of the Spirit in Christ's members, at first tacitly recognised and yielded to; later, the exercise of the more practical or less "prophetic" gifts formally sanctioned by Church action, in appointment or ordination, through the medium of missionary or local leaders: this confirmed by the *Didaché*. No "monarchical episcopate" in the New Testament.
   (*d*) The nature of the Church's unity independent of uniform or unified organisation: its local units self-governing *as churches*, under Christ's Headship, through the Spirit: the priesthood of Christians and the ministry representative of this: Evangelic "authority" and "order."
   (*e*) Emergence of "monarchical episcopate" in the single church pastor, at various dates from the end of the first century: its nature, as distinct from "*the* historic episcopate" of Catholicism.
   (*f*) Change in spirit about 200 A.D., due to extra-evangelic factors.
2. The Protestant idea of the Church suits its place in the earliest Creed as an object of *faith*: the *testimonium Spiritus sancti* needful to it, as to other religious ideas.
3. The witness of modern experience, especially on the Mission Field, to the above ideas of Church and Ministry.

THE PROTESTANT IDEA OF CHURCH AND MINISTRY AS ROOTED IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY [1]

THE Protestant idea of the Church and its Ministry, in its essence and spirit rather than as seen in any one of the Confessions in which it has been embodied —from the Anglican Articles, on the one hand, to the Westminster or the Savoy Confession on the other—shows itself most clearly by special emphasis on certain aspects of Christian faith and life. As regards the Church, the emphasis does not really fall on its invisible rather than visible aspect (an antithesis due partly to temporary controversial conditions, partly also to the Augustinian doctrine of Predestination as revived by Calvin), but on the real rather than the seeming Church. To this idea of the Church, as a spiritual or ideal reality by no means adequately represented by its outward manifestations, answers an emphasis on grace in actual Christian experience, however mediated. Grace comes through the Gospel as written in the Bible, preached in faith, and visible in Christian

[1] A public lecture delivered in Mansfield College, on the evening of November 28, 1910.

lives, rather than through special Sacraments or orders. Accordingly the Protestant idea of the Ministry, while far from indifferent to order, is opposed to the emphasis on particular "orders," and tends to lay its stress rather on manifest God-given "gift" as essential. It will be the aim of this lecture to justify from early Christian history the justice of the Protestant emphasis in these matters, and to apply its principles to modern conditions.

We must begin with Christ's own teaching as to His Church found in Matt. xvi. 17 f. Read in their true setting, namely, the conditions present to the minds of the disciples, and not those of any later age, Jesus' words can surely have but one primary meaning. At a most critical stage in His ministry and in the training of the inner circle of His disciples, Jesus has just elicited from Peter, their representative spokesman, the confession that, in spite of all that seemed to belie it, He is indeed the Christ, the Anointed Head of the coming Kingdom of God. The solemn joy with which Jesus greets such a faith as the result of direct Divine revelation, shows how fundamental in relation to the Kingdom of God was the conviction which it embodied. Fitly, indeed, was *he* named Rock-man (*Petros*) in whose soul this conviction had established itself; for this was the rock-faith which should be the basis of stability, not only for him (whose character so much needed a grounding in something other than his

own native strength of feeling), but also for the whole society of like-minded disciples which it was Jesus' prime concern to create. It was in such a "Church," or Messianic congregation, looking to Him as its Head, even though Israel as a nation failed to recognise in Him their Messiah, that Jesus saw the realisation of the Kingdom of God to be implicit. It was to embody His Spirit, and, as He goes on immediately to declare, was to have one law of life with Himself, its Head, even that of life through death. All that was to be distinctive of it, the new Israel, as compared with the old, was in Himself. Hence He, as appropriated by the soul's inmost faith, was in fact the Rock on which all was to be built, both for the Church as a whole and for its constituent members. Of these Peter, the first to build his faith confessedly on the true Rock or foundation (cf. 1 Cor. iii. 11), was the primary type ; and in virtue of his special personal relation to the Head of the Church, in and through which the Kingdom was to come, he was to have a decisive part in defining the conditions under which admission thereto should one day be given to others. Later on, when this function of stewardship in the "household" of faith is actually conferred on Peter, with the gift of the Holy Spirit (John xx. 21–23), it is to him along with others of Jesus' tested personal disciples (see Luke xxiv. 33 ff.), and not only to the remaining eleven "apostles," that it is given. Nay, the apostolic circle, whether

in the narrower or wider sense, has, as Dr. Hort observes in his classic work on *The Christian Ecclesia*,[1] no power given to it save as the primary "representatives of the whole Ecclesia of the future"—to which Matt. xviii. 15–20 is virtually addressed[2]; only their relation of discipleship to the Master was closer than that of other disciples then in being or yet to be. In this latter capacity they occupied the unique and incommunicable position of secondary founders, or the foundation stratum of the building (Eph. ii. 20) reared on Christ Himself—the One foundation, as St. Paul puts it (1 Cor. iii. 11), "the living stone," "elect with God," as St. Peter has it in his Epistle (1 Pet. ii. 4). But, apart from this inevitable distinction, they are not marked out for any official authority differing in kind from that inherent in the society of believers in Jesus as God's Messiah. This Society was to be, like them, the recipient of the Holy Spirit mediated by Him; and of it we read,

[1] "If at the Last Supper, and during the discourses which followed, . . . they represented the whole Ecclesia of the future, it is but natural to suppose that it was likewise as representatives of the whole Ecclesia of the future, whether associated with other disciples or not, that they had given to them those two assurances and charges of our Lord" which are often thought to apply to them exclusively as "the Apostles" (p. 33).

[2] It is the disciple as such who is to seek reconciliation with an offending brother, with or without the help of "one or two more." "And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church. . . . Verily I say unto you, What things soever ye (*i.e.* the church, even in the local form here in question) shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. . . . For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

in Matt. xviii. 15–18, that it too, even in its local capacity—analogous to that of each synagogue within Judaism—should have its decisions touching its own communion, in "binding" and "loosing," held valid before God. Of any *commission* in virtue of which the apostles, in any sense, were meant by Christ to *delegate official authority*,[1] in whole or in part, to others, there is not a hint in the Gospels. In truth, in view of the expected speedy return of Christ, it would have seemed superfluous. Further, speaking correctly, they did not themselves possess authority *ex officio*, but rather in virtue of personal qualification conditioned by their special discipleship. Through this they enjoyed as a body, and as led by the most richly endowed among them—it might be Peter,

[1] This is even clearer than Dr. Hort's more general thesis, that "there is no trace in Scripture of a formal commission of authority for government from Christ Himself" to the apostles, true as that is, when read with due regard to the qualifications which Hort supplies in the wording and context of his statement (p. 84). The apostolic commission was essentially such as attached to men specially trained by intercourse with Jesus Himself, to be His primary witnesses and to expound, by the aid of the Spirit given to all believers according to their several capacities, the authentic principles of His Gospel in their fresh applications to classes and individuals; in fact, "to give" Christ's household "their portion of food in due season" (Luke xii. 42). "Round this, their definite function, grew up in process of time an indefinite authority, the natural and right and necessary consequence of their unique position," an authority which extended to administration and government—including the ordination or solemn setting apart of others to ministry in the Church. But "it did not supersede the responsibility and action of the Elders or the Ecclesia at large, but called them out" (pp. 230 f.).

it might be James the Lord's brother, not an "apostle" at all in the strict sense (as at the council in Acts xv.)—a fuller measure of the Spirit's illumination than could be counted upon elsewhere, even in the Spirit-possessed community. But all this was on *prophetic* lines rather than those of office: indeed the very *idea of official grace* seems quite alien to the spirit of Christ's teaching and the life of the early apostolic age.

It has been needful to deal thus fully with the nature of the apostolic commission, because much difference of opinion as to the ministry has its root in a certain confusion of thought on this point. Authority regarding the Gospel and its practical applications, as something attaching to the primary "witnesses," is one thing: authority for the *organisation* of the Church as an *institution*, including an official ministry of oversight meant to propagate itself and the delegated power thought to be transmitted to it, is quite another.[1] And while authority touch-

[1] It is strange that so essential and obvious a distinction is often overlooked, as it is by Dr. Bright, *e.g.* in *Some Aspects of Primitive Church Life*. Though he rightly defines the purpose of the stewardship referred to in Luke xii. 42 as that of dispensing spiritual "food in due season" (p. 15), he extends this *inferentially*, in violation of the law of parabolic teaching, so as to prove "a delegated 'rule' over the servants in general" as "essential to the function" of the apostles. He further speaks of such governmental stewardship as "permanent," and deduces the idea of a delegation to others of part of the same office and of power to transmit this in turn (cf. 48 and note)—ideas quite alien to the spirit and context of the simile and to its restricted temporal horizon, as determined by the return of the Lord of the house during the lifetime of the original stewards (Luke xii. 42 ff.; Matt. xxiv. 45 ff.).

ing this ministry of the Word is given in a special manner to the original apostolic circle, there is no trace in the Gospels of authority for ordination of other ministers or touching sacraments, as forming part of any commission given by Christ. The distinction affects the very genius of His Gospel; and it is more than precarious to assume from the presence of the one kind of commission the tacit inclusion of the other.

What has been said so far touching the idea of the Church and of its primary ministry is fully borne out by the Book of Acts, and particularly its account of Pentecost. There we are made to see that the outpouring of the Messianic gift of the Spirit, as foretold in Joel, was the essential mark of the New Community; its "sons" and "daughters" should prophesy; they should live under the direct initiative of the Spirit, who quickens spiritual "gifts" in one and another as God wills, but always (as St. Paul emphasises in his Epistles) for use in ministry unto the common profit. To this we shall return shortly. Meantime we notice how the nature of the apostolic authority for admitting to the Kingdom, simply by declaring the conditions of forgiveness of sins, is made clear in what Peter says in reply to the people's question, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And the like occurs again and again, and always in relation to classes of would-be members of the Church rather than to individuals.

Take the admission of the Samaritans, who seemed a doubtful class of converts until Peter and John exercised the function of "loosing" any restrictions on faith which might be thought to "bind" them. Here was an act "on earth" which was proved to be sanctioned "in heaven" by the manifest coming upon this fresh class of believers of the Holy Spirit. This was at first a usual accompaniment of faith in Jesus as the Christ; and in the case of Cornelius and his friends it appeared while Peter was preaching the Gospel to them, apart from any act of prayer and laying-on of hands; so that these cannot be regarded as having been essential conditions of the gift in question. Again, in the Jerusalem Conference of Acts xv. we have another case of apostolic "binding" and "loosing," as regards the conditions of Gentile membership in the Church; only here the whole Jerusalem Church partakes in the authority of the act. James the Lord's brother, who was not an apostle in the strict sense, largely determines the decision; the presbyters or local representatives of the Church share in it and in its formal promulgation; and the consent of the whole local brotherhood is noted. These were all cases which directly involved the principles of the Gospel itself, of which the apostles were naturally the primary witnesses and interpreters, and where their authority, as defined by a special commission from Christ, was therefore at its maximum. Yet even here they do not act, when the co-operation of

the Church as a whole is available, and notably where the case is the gravest of all, on their own independent authority, but rather as representatives—if the primary and natural representatives—of the Spirit-possessed Church of Christ. It is as Dr. Hort puts it, when he says (p. 84): "There is indeed no trace in Scripture of a formal commission of authority for government from Christ Himself," peculiar to the apostles. "Their commission was to be witnesses of Himself." Out of their unique position in this respect would naturally grow "an ill-defined but lofty authority in matters of government and administration," by general consent. That is, their authority in such matters was the authority of moral influence, not of formal commission; and they had no thought of determining *ex officio* the method of the Church's future organisation, or devolving on any part of its ministry, as this arose spontaneously by the teachings of experience, any authority from themselves for government, ordination, or sacramental grace.

As regards the more ordinary or local kind of ministry, elders (presbyters) were the chief type, in keeping with existing Jewish habits. Now there is no notice in the New Testament of the original apostles having had any hand in their appointment—as though no principle of moment were involved in the matter—whenever and however it may have come about. Possibly it was at first on informal and patriarchal lines, rather than by any definite

act of election by the Church as a whole, with sanction and solemn setting apart by the apostles, such as we read of in the case of the seven almoners (Acts vi.) called into being by a special exigency in the Church's corporate life.[1] In any case had devolution of authority from the apostles to the Church's ordinary leaders, the elders (supposing it actually to have taken place), been regarded as a matter of prime principle—as it has been esteemed in later times—it would surely have been recorded.

The fact is that, apart from the original apostolic circle, who stood very much in a unique position as spiritual Fathers of the Church, like apostolic missionaries in all ages, ministry in the Apostolic Age had quite another origin than that suggested by the terms "devolution of authority" or "apostolic succession." It was determined by *charismatic* gifts, operative in a community conscious of special inspiration by the Spirit of God, as the link between itself and the Head of the Church. Accordingly the basis of the Church's ministry at large, whether that of the Word or other, lay in the "gift" qualifying for any form of service to the brethren in their corporate life or fellowship (*koinonia*). Such gifts were traced ultimately to Christ, the Head of the Church, and directly to the Holy Spirit; while the corporate capacity to recognise their

[1] In this connexion we gather that the apostles regarded "the ministry of the Word," not administration, as their own proper calling.

presence in any member was referred to the same Spirit, at work in measure in all. Hence both the call inherent in the gift, and the outward ratification afforded by the common consciousness of the Spirit-bearing Church, sanctioning the regular use of such a gift in its midst, were alike Divine in origin, and together constituted the authority for the exercise of the ministry in question. That is, gifts determined functions in members of the body; function became recognised ministry by common consent; and common consent passed at length in certain cases into formal appointment by the local Church, acting through its leaders, whether general or local.

This is what emerges clearly from a study of St. Paul's Epistles, which give us our most direct insight into the stages through which the idea of ministry passed, ere it reached that of settled office with definite duties and powers. Space forbids more than a few illustrations. Take first a quotation from so typical a writing as the Epistle to the Romans. Having referred to the idea of the Church as an organism made up of many mutually dependent members, Paul adds (xii. 6–9): "And having gifts (*charismata*) differing according to the grace given to us, whether prophecy (inspired utterance in general), let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith; or ministry (*i.e.* practical service), let us exercise our ministry; or he that teacheth, his teaching; or he that exhorteth, his exhorting; he that communicateth

(of his goods), with liberality; he that acts as patron (*προιστάμενος*, cf. Rom. xvi. 2), with diligence; he that doeth deeds of mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without affectation." Here observe: (1) the gifts are their own warrant for service; (2) the writer passes easily from gifts *per se*, to persons who have and use gifts; (3) the gifts include both what we should call exceptional or supernormal, like prophecy, and more normal human functions, such as aptitude for kindly service, leadership, or acts of charity; (4) the spirit of the whole corporate life, its bond, is Love, in the peculiarly deep and wide Christian sense. Some of these points receive further definition for us in other passages in Paul's letters. Thus the originally spontaneous or personal nature of Christian ministry comes out in 1 Cor. xvi. 15 f.: "Now I beseech you, brethren—ye know the household of Stephanas, that it is a first-fruit of Achaia, and that they have *set themselves to minister unto the saints*—that *ye also submit yourselves* unto such,[1] and *to every one* that helpeth in the work and laboureth"; and he continues, "Recognise then such persons." Here

[1] The words "be in subjection (*ὑποτάσσησθε*) to such" are here the important ones, showing that it is no case of "deferential regard for spiritual aptitudes and activities of laymen," as Dr. W. Bright would have it (*Some Aspects of Primitive Church Life*, p. 27). But it is most characteristic of the spirit and emphasis of the earliest Christian thought about the ministry, that the aspect of "ministry" or personal service at first prevails, and that it is only gradually that the aspect of leadership or government, which is in practice implicit in the other, receives more notice; cf. below on 1 Cor. xii. 28.

we have clear evidence that there was at Corinth a type of local ministry which called for subordination on the part of those ministered to, and yet was of spontaneous origin, not of formal appointment either by this Church's founder or by the Church itself; and the like was seemingly true elsewhere, to judge from 1 Thess. v. 12. "But we beseech you, brethren, to know them that labour among you, and are your patrons [1] in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." But at Corinth we see from the very way in which their apostle writes touching the disorders in Church life, that there was as yet no body of persons on the spot with recognised ministerial authority, able to control the over-exuberance and self-assertiveness of the exercise, in church meeting, of the various inspired "gifts" which Paul recognises as so abundant among them (i. 5–7, xiv. *passim*). Among such gifts, as referred to in ch. xii., we can, however, discern those possessed by the persons whom later in the Epistle he describes as devoting themselves to "minister to the saints," viz. "gifts" of *assistance* and *guidance* (such as the steersman gives to the ship, xii. 28). Here surely we have the

[1] The verb rendered "are over you" (προϊστασθαι) means rather "take protective charge of," as the ancient patron did of his clients, caring for their interests generally. The idea of leadership or rule is subordinate to this; thus Phœbe is called (Rom. xvi. 1 f.) first a "minister" or servant of the church at Cenchreæ, and then a "succourer" or patroness (προστάτις) of many.

vital germ of the *functions*, later the *offices*, of "deacons" and "bishops"—suggestively enough, in the reverse order to that in which they came to rank as regular offices. For at first practical help to those in need seemed more necessary, as it was certainly more distinctive of the Christian spirit, than discipline and order, individual and corporate, among the members of Christ's Church (see note to p. 14). Experience in the long-run brought out the full importance of the latter, especially as the exceptional moral control of the missionary founders of churches was gradually withdrawn.

All ministry, then, was at first *charismatic* in basis, whether "apostles, prophets, teachers"—the special ministers of the inspired Word of the Gospel, as revealed by the Spirit—or, again, "helpers" of the needy, and "overseers" or guardians of the Church's life collectively and individually. But while this was so originally, and therefore in idea, a difference ere long emerged as regards formal recognition or appointment by the Church. The reasons of this distinction seem twofold; the less manifest nature of the Spirit's presence in the latter type of ministers, and the more constant and intimate relation between them and the local church whom they served representatively. "Apostles," in the wider sense of men with a special missionary enthusiasm and power (including a Barnabas and Silas, and probably a Philip the Evangelist), along with "prophets" and "teachers"—these, in their

several degrees, were *charismatic* ministers *par excellence*; and their ministry had either no local limitation or only a rather accidental one. There is *no trace of any such* "gifted" men of the first order *being ordained* to their ministry by any person or body of persons; they seem, nevertheless—and this is most significant—to have offered the representative Eucharistic prayer on behalf of the local church, when any of them happened to be present. The act, that is to say, was regarded as a prophetic or inspired one; and, if we may judge from 1 Cor. xiv. 16, one or more members of the Church who had the requisite gift might in early days lead its devotions in this way. But, in any case, Eucharistic prayer was not originally among the special functions of the ordinary local ministry of "oversight" and "relief," the less gifted genus of which official elders or presbyters were the primary type. Such elders were from the first, in some churches at least, *e.g.* those of South Galatia in Acts xiv. 23, formally appointed and set apart with prayer to their responsible representative ministry; and although usage probably varied a good deal, according as the converts were before accustomed to Jewish or non-Jewish types of leadership, there were soon ministers of the type of elders, such as Paul describes in Eph. iv. 11 as "pastors and teachers," regularly appointed or ordained in the churches generally, so far as known to us. These not only acted as pastors of the flock in detail, but

also exercised a presiding or controlling influence over the conduct of its meetings for worship and mutual edification, while not themselves necessarily leading the Church in teaching, prayer, or praise.

But as time went on, prophetic or inspired spontaneity tended to play an ever smaller part in ordinary Church worship, and even to be looked at rather askance. Already in 1 Thess. v. 19–21, St. Paul has occasion to write: "Quench not the Spirit, despise not prophesyings; put all things to the test; hold fast that which is good." Moreover, a sort of fixed, local type of prayer, particularly Eucharistic prayer, gradually took shape, perhaps through the influence of some prophetic person, whose favourite ideas and expressions would be used by others, and especially by the presiding elders or "overseers" (cf. Acts xx. 28), when it fell to them in the absence of *charismatic* persons to take the lead in the Church's Eucharist. Such a state of things meets us most clearly in the traditional "Teaching of the Apostles" current in some region of Syria, as reduced to writing probably about the last quarter of the first century. This "Teaching" or *Didaché* enables us to co-ordinate a good many hints found scattered about the New Testament, and to fill in these outlines still further. From it we gather that the unordained, *charismatic* ministry was dying out, partly through the openings it offered for abuses; and that its functions were passing to the more ordinary

local ministry, here styled "bishops (overseers) and deacons." To judge from their qualifications, as of character rather than special gift, they were originally of the administrative type already described; but as the need arose they were coming to "exercise the ministry of the prophets and teachers," the more gifted ministry now passing away. Unlike these, "bishops and deacons" are to be elected by their local church, and apparently ordained by it also, probably through the medium of its existing leaders, *charismatic* or official; but the procedure is not specified, as though no important principle were involved in it—since elsewhere, in the *Didaché* ritual instructions are quite specific.

This state of things is analogous to that implied in the Pastoral Epistles to Timothy and Titus: only the transition from a mainly *charismatic* ministry to one of regular office came earlier in the highly developed city life of Græcised Western Asia and Crete, than was natural in the more rural conditions of Syrian life, as implied by the *Didaché*. But even in the former cases the change is only beginning; and the officers whose importance is now for the first time emphasised by St. Paul are simply elders and deacons. "Of officers higher than elders," says Hort (p. 232), "we find nothing that points to an institution or system, nothing like the episcopal system of later times. In the New Testament the word *episcopos*, as applied to men, mainly, if not always, is not a title, but a descrip-

tion of the elder's function." As regards the temporary duties of Timothy and Titus as apostolic delegates, these seem no more integral to the system which they were to help the Churches to establish, than were the apostles themselves, whose functions as founders naturally ceased with their own lives and with the work of foundation.

The Church idea involved in the prayers which the *Didaché* cites as to be used at the Eucharistic meal is of high interest for us. It shows how intense the corporate consciousness of spiritual oneness was at a time when each local community was unconnected by any permanent organisation with its sister churches, yet all Christ's members were none the less felt to constitute God's one holy Church, waiting to be gathered in visible unity into His Kingdom, as the many grains of the one loaf of communion had been gathered into unity. This answers completely to St. Paul's idea of the Church in the Epistle to the Ephesians, as summed up by Dr. Hort (p. 168): "Not a word in the Epistle exhibits the One Ecclesia as made up of many *ecclesiæ*. To each local Ecclesiæ St. Paul has ascribed a corresponding unity of its own: each is a body of Christ and a sanctuary of God: but there is no grouping of them into partial wholes or into one great whole [*i.e.* by a unified organisation]. The *members which make up the One Ecclesia* are not communities, but individual men. The One Ecclesia includes all members of all partial Ecclesiæ; but

its relations to them all are direct, not mediate. It is true that . . . St. Paul anxiously promoted friendly intercourse and sympathy between the scattered Ecclesiæ: but the unity of the universal Ecclesia, as he contemplated it, does not belong to this region: it is a truth of theology and of religion, not a fact of what we call ecclesiastical politics" [*i.e.* polity]. This is one of the most important passages that have been written in recent years on the subject of the Church and its real unity: and until it is duly assimilated by Churchmen of all types, we shall not get much secure progress towards more formal and visible unity, such as Hort goes on to recognise as important for the Church's well-being, but always on the basis of the invisible and most real unity which it already has "in Christ," that is, in virtue of the relation of each living member to Him as Head—in addition to his local church membership. This is *exactly the underlying Protestant idea of the Church* and its unity. This "unity of the Spirit" is the *esse* of the Church's oneness. As for further corporate unity, beyond the inter-communion which St. Paul presupposes as the corollary of "One Lord," "one faith," in Him as such, "one baptism" as its outward sign and seal—inter-communion which only an exclusive doctrine of the "historic Episcopate" limits and hinders to-day—this is of the *bene esse* of the Church. As such, it is well worthy our efforts to realise it, save at the cost of obscuring or surrendering the

deeper truth of existing unity in the Head, which St. Paul here and always emphasises.

Here, once more, the question of the idea of the Church has brought into view that of its ministry, which Protestants make secondary, but "Catholics" of all sorts treat as practically determinative. On this point, too, we may quote Dr. Hort's summing up of New Testament teaching[1]: "The Apostles were not in any proper sense officers of the Ecclesia." As its founders through the message of the Gospel, they came indeed to exercise in practice a moral authority in the Church which had no formal limits; but it was an authority incapable of transmission, and they made no claim to transmit it. "There is no trace in the New Testament that any ordinances on this subject [*i.e.* the constitution of a ministry for the Church] were prescribed by the Lord, or that any such ordinances were set up as permanently binding by the Twelve or by St. Paul or by the Ecclesia at large. Their faith in the Holy Spirit and His perpetual guidance was too much of a reality to make that possible." As regards the normal authority (*i.e.* apart from the presence of apostles or other "gifted" persons) through which the Holy Spirit was regarded as guiding the Church in its corporate acts, including the selection and appointment of its own ministry, as in essence divinely given through *charismatic* gifts, Dr. Hort further says (p. 229): "Nothing perhaps has been

[1] *Christian Ecclesia*, pp. 329 ff.

more prominent in our examination of the Ecclesiæ of the Apostolic Age than the fact that the Ecclesia itself, *i.e.* apparently the sum of all its male adult members, is the primary body, and it would seem, even the primary authority. It may be that this state of things was in some ways a mark of immaturity. . . . Still the *very origin and fundamental nature of the Ecclesia as a community of disciples* renders it impossible that the principle should rightly become obsolete. In a word, we cannot properly speak of an organisation of a community from which the greater part of its members are excluded. The true way, the apostolic way, of regarding offices or officers in the Ecclesia is to regard them as organs of its corporate life for special purposes; so that the offices of an Ecclesia at any period are only a part of its organisation." Yet can it be questioned that the principle of corporate control over the ministry, and over Church action generally, as belonging to the whole body of Church members constituting the local Church fellowship, has in fact become almost "obsolete" save where the Protestant idea of Church and ministry prevail? And can it be imagined that such a fundamental change of emphasis and perspective is not largely responsible for the gulf at present fixed between "Catholic" and "Protestant" ideals of the organisation of the Spirit-bearing Body of Christ? With true insight was it that Luther saw and declared[1] that the

[1] Compare Lindsay, *History of the Reformation*, i. 440 ff.

priesthood and kingship of all true believers in Christ was the characteristic and determinative idea of the Church, in the light of the Gospel; and that the opposite doctrine of a divinely instituted and exclusive official priesthood, self-propagated and autocratic in its authority, was inconsistent therewith. It is true that Dr. Moberly, with his idea of "ministerial priesthood," has done something in recent years to bring the two terms and aspects of this antithesis together in a higher unity. But it is to be feared that his attempt does not go quite to the root of the matter. He still holds that there is no valid "ministerial priesthood" for sacramental purposes which owes its Churchly commission simply to the authority immanent in the Church's corporate life as such. Yet the kind of ministerial authority which Dr. Moberly is at pains to exclude is for many the only one which comports with a truly representative view of ministry for a society that is itself "a holy priesthood," qualified itself "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. ii. 5; cf. Apoc. i. 6). These sacrifices the Apostle Peter does not stay to define, like the writer to Hebrews, as the "sacrifice of praise" (xiii. 15), and like the *Didaché* (xv.) as the sacrifice of Thanksgiving made pure by mutual love. But he clearly has in mind the proper Christian sacrifices, so defined, touching which Irenæus more than a century later says: "Sacrifices do not sanctify a man: but the conscience, if pure,

of him who offers sanctifies the sacrifice, and causes God to accept it as from a friend "—a friend already sanctified and made a priest, as Hebrews teaches, on the abiding basis of the One atoning Sacrifice in Jesus Christ. Accordingly the Church's "ministerial priesthood" is simply one of specialised representatives, through whom it gives orderly and organic expression, as through its most spiritually fit members, to its self-oblation in thankful devotion—symbolised in the material "gifts" of God's bounty which the Church returns to Him in earnest of its complete homage. In return it receives, as God's answering gift, the fresh grace of Christ, given directly by His Spirit to the waiting soul as it receives the outward symbols of Christ's body and blood — representing Christ Himself —with loving faith. This is the Catholic Protestant idea of the ministry, answering to that of the Church, as defined *e.g.* in the nineteenth and twenty-third Articles of the Church of England—themselves based on the primary Lutheran Confession of Augsburg. Article XXIII. defines "the office of public preaching" and "ministering the Sacraments in the Congregation" (Church), as lawfully held by such as "be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the Congregation, to call and send Ministers into the Lord's vineyard." Protestants differ as to the exact nature of the "public authority" needful, on the ground of early precedent and expediency, as also in the methods of

"choosing and calling" to office: but in essential idea they are at one; and it is an idea deeply rooted in early Christianity. It is the idea of "order," but not of "orders" in the "Catholic" sense.

That about the end of the second Christian generation the oversight of each local or city church begins in certain regions to appear as focused in a single chief pastor or bishop, is a fact which no Protestant need care to dispute. Such a type of episcopate, the most truly "historic" of all, and the only one entitled to claim even partial apostolic sanction, is common to the great bulk of Protestant communions. But not even it can justly claim the special authority meant by "apostolic succession." The very idea involved in this phrase can be traced at most in one writing only of the sub-apostolic period; and that one, significantly enough, represents the Church in Rome. But in fact it is most doubtful whether even it really contains the idea in question. The Epistle of Clement, dating *c.* 96 A.D., remonstrates with the Church in Corinth for having without due cause deposed from office, not a single bishop, but a body of "bishops," otherwise called "presbyters." The crucial passage is as follows (ch. xliv.):—

"Our apostles . . . appointed the aforesaid persons; and afterwards they gave a fresh instruction that, if these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. Those,

then, who were appointed by them, or afterward by other men of repute with the consent of the church as a whole, and have ministered unblamably to the flock of Christ in lowliness of mind, peacefully and with all modesty, and for a long time have borne a good report with all—these men we consider to be unjustly thrust out from their ministry. For it will be no light sin for us, if we thrust out from the office of oversight those who have offered the gifts unblamably and holily. . . . For we see that ye have displaced certain persons, though they were living honourably, from the ministry which had been blamelessly performed with reverence by them."

Here we observe that (1) the office instituted by apostles for the continuous "oversight" (episcopate) of each church, as long as Christ should tarry, was that of a presbyteral college,[1] not of a single bishop in an order distinct from the presbyterate; (2) it is not suggested that the local church had no authority to transfer the office in question from one body of office-bearers to another, but rather that it had done so "unjustly" in the case of men who had "served the flock of Christ blamelessly" and with universal acceptance during a long period; (3) this irregularity was the more grave in view of the fact that the Corinthian majority were thereby setting aside men appointed to an office of "oversight" *apostolic in origin* and *in the method* estab-

[1] Corresponding practically to a "church-session" in Presbyterianism or in the early Congregational churches, where the office of "elder" was kept distinct from that of "deacon," with which it was blended later on.

lished for filling up vacancies in its ranks. But it is nowhere claimed that the respect due to such an order of ministry owed anything to any *grace of orders* transmitted from the apostles to any one at all. Yet such a consideration, had it been present to the mind of Christians at that date, would have added enormously to the gravity alike of the irregularity and of the protest raised in this epistle. Instead of this, the expression used to describe those who succeeded to the function originally performed by the apostles themselves, that of formally "appointing" to office by some solemn action those approved by the whole local church, is simply "other men of repute" (ἕτεροι ἐλλόγιμοι ἄνδρες)—a phrase denoting moral authority in the community, but quite devoid of other suggestions. In particular, there is no suggestion that the "other men of repute" had been appointed or ordained by the apostles for this purpose. In a word, there is *no doctrine of succession to apostolic grace*, but only of *continuity in apostolic order*.

Further, the whole statement of the current Roman theory is quite general, with the generality of an *a priori* assumption rather than of exhaustive historical knowledge. We happen, too, to know that it is in part at least inaccurate, inasmuch as we have already seen that in the early days of the very Corinthian Church thus censured the ministry exercised by certain of its "first-fruits" was rooted, not in apostolic ordination, but in spontaneous

use of a gift and impulse to serve the brethren. And the impression of *a priori* theory is further enhanced when we note the other arguments already adduced by the Roman writer. They are Old Testament legal analogy, and the analogy of the order visible not only in Nature but also in ordinary civil and military administration. In other words, we here see the old Roman spirit, with its one-sided zeal for legal methods, encroaching on the spirit of the Gospel, which secures its order by other methods more germane to the development and exercise of spiritual personality in the local brotherhood. Thus the Epistle of Clement is significant not so much for the Church's past as for its future developments, especially in the Latin world: it helps to explain why the more primitive idea and methods of Church and ministry did not survive longer than they actually did.

Then as regards Ignatius' witness to the single episcopate: there is nothing in his evidence as to the light in which the office was regarded, where it as yet existed, which conflicts with the Protestant idea, save the rhetorical and one-sided emphasis of his language touching an office in which he rightly saw the visible focus and guardian of each church's unity — then gravely menaced both by heresy and schism. Such an emphasis was largely personal to himself and his emotional temperament. But it only makes more striking the fact that *nowhere does he connect the claim* made for the

episcopate, as distinct from the presbyterate, *with any special devolution from the apostles*.[1] Nor does he ever suggest that authority to administer the Sacraments depended in the case of any one on episcopal ordination; but only that it should not be exercised without the bishop's sanction, in order to avoid a sectional type of communion service destructive of Church unity.

And so we might go on throughout the second century, showing that if we only discriminate the points really at issue—of which the orderly transmission of the episcopate or chief local pastorate is *not* one—primitive Christianity as a whole, during not only that century but also well into the next (though more in some parts of the Church than in others), favours the Protestant idea both as to Church and ministry. It is true that from the end of the second century there is felt increasingly

[1] Thus Dr. Bright (*op. cit.* p. 43 note) writes: "It is true that Ignatius does not describe bishops as representatives of Apostles; but he does what is more, he describes them as representing the highest spiritual authority, that of 'the Father' in His relation to Christ (Magn. 3, 6, 13; Trall. 3; Smyrn. 8); or of Christ either in His relation to His Apostles, or absolutely (Eph. 6; Trall. 2)." But Dr. Bright overlooks the fact that it is not the "more" or less of Ignatius' metaphors for setting forth his sense of the spiritual authority of the bishop's office that is at issue, whether as regards Ignatius' witness or in general: it is the relation of episcopal authority, whether more or less, to the mode of episcopal appointment, and especially to the apostles as supposed channels of the grace in question. But this is just the aspect of the matter on which Ignatius is silent, and apparently not interested: he refers all this directly to God.

the blending of another idea, which presented both in a more legal and institutional light. But that is not surprising in view, *e.g.*, of what we have learnt from Clement's Epistle as to the reaction of extra-evangelic ideas and analogies upon men's thoughts touching ideals so spiritual in their nature and guarantees—ideals turning on nothing less than the Holy Spirit's abiding control of the soul of Christ's Body, the Church. Still, enough has perhaps been adduced to show how deeply rooted the Protestant ideas in question are in early Christianity, and how seriously their distinctive emphasis should be reckoned with by all who reverence the witness of the Church's history when it stood most directly under the influences flowing from the historic life and work of the Church's Lord and Head.

There is a further consideration favouring the Protestant idea of the Church, which seems often to be overlooked by those who narrow down the epithets "Catholic" and "Apostolic" as applied to the Church, so as to become practically synonymous with "Episcopal." It is a religious rather than historical consideration, but all the more crucial; and it is this. The Protestant idea is the only one which so conceives the Church as to justify its place in one of the articles of the Creed. "I believe in the Holy Church": so ran a clause in the earliest traceable form of what developed into the so-called "Apostles' Creed." Here the confession of faith in the Church

is of a piece with the rest of the Creed, viz. a body of properly religious truth, touching God as Father Almighty, Christ Jesus as His Son, the Holy Spirit, the remission of sins, and the resurrection of the body. In this sequence "the Holy Church" comes between the Holy Spirit and the remission of sins as objects of religious faith; and in such a way (with no fresh, formal statement of belief, by repetition of "and in") as to suggest that it and the other two objects of faith which follow are simply applications of the faith in the Holy Spirit, forms in which His operations are, or are to be, realised. Now such a confession of religious confidence must express matter of spiritual insight, and not something which, like the Church as recognisable by the "historical episcopate," is a matter of everyday experience or human tradition. *Faith as moral and religious insight is needed to perceive the Church, as a body claiming holiness* after the type presented in Christ, the primary object of Christian faith. But, for belief in the Church as "holy" and "Catholic" or "apostolic," because possessing an episcopate apostolical by succession through a special mode of ordination, something very different is needful, something lying outside the sphere of religious or spiritual faith as such, namely, mere belief in tradition on a matter of history, or at best, ability to test and verify the historical evidence for oneself. Surely neither of these is of the nature of

"faith" in any sense in which Christ asked or asks for it.

On the other hand, the kind of faith which the Protestant idea of the Church demands of those who truly believe in the Church of Christ—holy, Apostolic, Catholic—is essentially moral and religious in its nature and origin, based on the Church's spiritual "fruits." It is strictly analogous, in fact, to faith in Jesus Himself, the Head of the Church, as reached by His original disciples and by real disciples ever since; that is, it rests on the intrinsic divinity visible under human forms which, alike in Head and Body, test and deepen the quality of faith in the very act of apprehending the Divine by latent, spiritual affinity. This is what Protestant theology means by its doctrine that the inner witness of the "Holy Spirit" (*testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*) is the ultimate ground of real faith, and not mere historical and external forms of witness, whether the Bible or the Church. This is a position unaffected by any valid criticism of the Bible or the Church; for it is the only one which does not involve, for the religious man at least, arguing in a circle. For neither Bible nor Church can be known to be a true *witness of Christ*, before Christ has authenticated Himself on His own merits to the soul's deepest needs and instincts. In this essential because religious respect, then, we can claim that the Protestant idea of the Church is most continuous with the spirit of early

Christianity, as indicated even in a widespread baptismal creed of the second and third centuries.

Yet even this confirmation of the findings of our more strictly historical survey does not exhaust their religious authentication. They are rooted not only in the past, but still more in the experience of modern Christendom, and particularly of English-speaking Christianity to-day, viewed in the light of a serious belief in the Divine Providence.

Consider the Protestant idea of the Church in its present form, now freed from earlier confusions of thought due mainly to an exaggerated notion of the influence of the intellectual element in Christian faith, whether for weal or woe, an error inherited from "Catholic" orthodoxy. We may claim for it that it can most easily, without any compromising expedient like the "uncovenanted mercies of God," find room for the facts of Christlike life and service found in all communions which "name the name of Christ in sincerity." In a word, it is the most truly catholic of Church ideas; and the practical attitude of those holding it is steadily, even rapidly, conforming more and more to its full scope and grandeur by fraternal recognition and love, especially on the foreign mission field. There Christians as such feel themselves face to face with one and the same kingdom of evil, and realise that they are essaying the same task of "making Christ King" in essentially the same sense and in reliance on essentially the same Divine resources. Yet on

those far mission fields, where the essential issues stand out more clearly to the average Christian eye than here at home, there is a line of demarcation on principle which hinders practical co-operation. There, as here, it is the traditional claim put forward for "the historic Episcopate" and its supposed exclusive possession of valid or sure sacramental communion with the one Head of all Christians alike. Truly an astounding claim in the face of patent facts, which seem so impressively to indicate like powers as flowing from that Head through the lives and labours of the workers of other communions, while yet the Eucharist is, by those who urge the claim, esteemed the chief ordinary channel of grace for the refreshing and invigorating of Christ's soldiers. Surely the time is coming, and is nearer than some realise, when those who have faith and courage enough to read the Divine "signs of the times," as Jesus reproached his generation for failing to do, will frankly recognise, and act on the recognition, that the chief responsibility for continued non-communion between bodies of Christians who bear all the intrinsic spiritual marks of membership in Christ's One Body, the Church as visible on earth, must lie with those who persist in adding to His own conditions of unity in the one Flock, namely, faith in the One Shepherd and love to all those who manifest this faith in life, acceptance of a special type of Episcopate as essential to "fulness of spiritual and

sacramental life." Such an office has, indeed, been associated with the Church's corporate life for the greater part of its history till some four centuries ago; but its past is one characterised by conditions very different from the present, and in the main by a lower level of individuality and maturity in Christian experience among the rank and file of the Church's members. Accordingly, while the claim to exclusive Divine commission has already been shown to be at least dubious in its historical credentials, the appeal to prescriptive right on the score of past experience is far less weighty than has often been supposed, and is daily losing in weight as compared with growing modern experience. How much this is the case, it will be the aim of the series of lectures on "The History and Witness of Evangelical Christianity" since the Reformation, to which the present lecture is introductory, to make more manifest to all who care to follow their story.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

BY

A. J. CARLYLE, D.Litt.

Evangelicals and the idea of the Church—The position at the Reformation—The relation of the Church of England to the Reformed Churches—Causes of the decline of this relationship—The Evangelical revival.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

I AM grateful to those who have been so kind as to allow me to speak to you, in this course of addresses, on the position of the Church of England in relation to the Evangelical conception of religion. I think that I have the profoundest respect for the religious convictions and tendencies of those members of the Church of England who might not wish to designate themselves by such a phrase as Evangelical; and I would recognise, and frankly, that within the English Church such men often stand for principles of immense significance, which those who have been more specifically called Evangelical have often in some degree neglected or underestimated. The sense of the corporate and social character of religion, the idea of the Church, have often been little apprehended by Evangelicals, and High Churchmen have done much to restore them, even though the particular terms under which they have done this seem to us incorrect and inadequate; while the conception of the perpetual organic development of ideas and forms of belief has been set forward by the Broad Church school, and without this the religious life must become fossilised and unmeaning.

And yet when all this has been said, I must confess that it seems to me that the Evangelical tradition is nearest to the essence of the distinctive position taken up by the Church of England in the sixteenth century, and represents most characteristically the essential conception of religion in England. For I think that behind all the varieties and divergences of English religion there is a quality which is characteristic, and this quality, whether in the Church of England or in the Free Churches, finds its best expression under some such term as that of Evangelical religion. The northern peoples, as is very evident from their literature, have in the last centuries represented the most imaginative, the most poetical strain in European civilisation, and their religion has the same character. It is this imaginative and poetical character which tends to make the Englishman in his religion so indifferent to the merely external effect and decoration, so indifferent to ritual, so independent of external beauty, and even, sometimes, of external comeliness. The heavenly vision within, the world of nature without, these are enough for him ; and his religion is distracted rather than stimulated by those external conditions which, as it is suggested at least, have so great an effect upon the minds of other people. A certain gravity, a certain sober dignity, these are almost all that the Englishman, even of the English Church, values in the externals of religion. And this just because his religion is imaginative and

profound. It is a singular and superficial delusion to think that the poetic temper in religion tends to the appreciation of the external forms with which religion may clothe itself. The natural religion of Englishmen is like the poetry of Wordsworth, which finds its heaven in the simplest human hearts, and the infinite in the tiny flower.

As it seems to me it is this conception of religion which marks the characteristic quality of the temper of the Reformation, and not least in England. In no country in Europe was the great conception of Luther, of the primary significance of justification by faith, more fully appreciated and more warmly held. And it is just in this doctrine that the Reformation found its most profound meaning. It is, indeed, here that we find that positive doctrine of the supreme significance of the internal in religion in which the deepest meaning of the Reformation lies. For the Reformation has a meaning which is distinctive and definite, and by which it is to be distinguished in the great revival of religion, which after the middle of the sixteenth century dominated Southern as well as Northern Europe, the Roman Catholic countries as well as those which had become Protestant. There was a real quickening of the moral and religious life of Europe, and everywhere this produced results both on the national and the individual life of immense significance. The religious and moral

fervour which is represented in Northern Europe by Luther and Calvin, by Knox and Cromwell, is reflected in Southern Europe by Loyola, and Xavier, and Charles Borromeo. The great revival is more significant than any one form of it, and has left deep and abiding traces in European life.

We must, however, also recognise that the Reformation had about it something characteristic, which distinguished it from the revival of religion in Roman Catholic countries, and this found its best expression in the sixteenth century in the doctrine of faith and justification. This is, indeed, the positive and fundamental conception of Luther. He was not primarily a negative thinker; indeed, it may perhaps be said that he was driven into negation, into the denial of the authority of the Pope, and finally even of the Church, because he found that his great positive doctrine of faith would not be accepted. Luther's own experience, which, like that of St. Paul, no doubt was more fully developed in some directions than that of the normal man, was yet only the vivid apprehension of the necessary and normal truth that a man once convinced of his faults and imperfections, once convicted of sin, to use the later phrase, can never find peace in his own external actions, or even in the order and protection of the Church, but only in the inner apprehension of the voice of God, speaking peace and forgiveness to his soul in Jesus Christ. This is the principle upon which the whole religious movement of Northern

Europe turned; and it is to this that from time to time it has turned back again. It is, indeed, easy enough to see that the argumentation about this was often arid and lifeless; but the principle of the freedom of the Christian man, of the free and immediate relation of the soul with God, has remained, and remains still, the primary characteristic of the religion of the reformed countries.

I have already said that there was no country in which this principle was more warmly received than in England. It is worthy of note that the revolt of a man like Latimer against the received religion was almost entirely governed by his impatience and anger at a system which confused the external discharge of religious exercises with real religion. And I do not know that any better brief statement of the whole new conception of religion can be found than that which is contained in the Homily, or sermon, "Of the Salvation of Mankind," to which the ninth Article of the Church of England refers us.

"Justification is not the office of man but of God; for man cannot make himself righteous by his own works, neither in part, nor in the whole. . . . But justification is the office of God only, and is not a thing which we render unto Him, but which we receive of Him, not which we give to Him, but which we take of Him, by His free mercy, and by the only merits of His most dearly beloved Son, our only Redeemer, Saviour, and Justifier, Jesus

Christ. . . . These great and merciful benefits of God, if they be well considered, do neither minister unto us occasion to be idle, and to live without doing any good works, neither yet stir us up by any means to do evil things ; but contrariwise, if we be not desperate persons, and our hearts harder than stones, they move us to render ourselves unto God wholly, with all our will, hearts, might, and power, to serve Him in all good deeds, obeying His commandments during our lives."

What is here set out briefly is the doctrine of all the great English religious writers and thinkers of the sixteenth century ; the doctrine of justification by faith is assumed by them as the very centre of the new movement in religion.

It is from this standpoint, and from this only, that we can properly appreciate the relation of the Church of England to the other Reformed Churches. In later days these close relations have often, unhappily, been relaxed ; and there are Churchmen so forgetful of the tradition of the Church as to claim rather to relate themselves in Europe to the Roman Catholic Church than to the Reformed Churches of Germany, or France, or Italy, or Spain. I fear that there are not wanting those in the Church who look upon this attitude as normal and natural. But, indeed, it is wholly abnormal, and it is completely out of accord with the principles and with the traditions of the reformed Church

of England. We were in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in communion with the reformed churches of Europe, and we are still, properly speaking, in communion with them to-day.

And the historical reason of this lay primarily in the fact that we held in common those conceptions of the nature of the spiritual life which had been restated by Luther, and had entered into the religious experience of English Christians. We had then, as we have to-day, certain differences with regard to the order and discipline of the Christian society; but these differences were then esteemed as trivial compared with the real unity in the doctrine of the spiritual experience.

Let me remind you of some phrases in Jewel's *Defence of the Apology* :—

"Before the time that God's holy will was that Doctor Luther should begin, after so long a time of ignorance, to publish the gospel of Christ, there was a general quietness, I grant, such as in the night-season, when folk lie asleep. Yet, I think, to continue such quietness, no wise man will wish to sleep still. You say, 'They have forsaken the Catholic Church: they went out from us who were not of us.' Nay, rather, M. Harding, we are returned to the Catholic Church of Christ, and have forsaken you because you have manifestly forsaken the ways of God." [1]

Or again—"These worthy and learned fathers,

[1] Jewel, *Defence of the Apology*, Cambridge, 1848, pp. 174, 175.

Luther and Zwinglius, and other like godly and zealous men, were appointed of God, not to erect a new church, but to reform the old." [1]

I do not mean that the Church of England had no characteristic differences from the other Reformed Churches; it is obvious that such differences existed then as they exist to-day. The Church of England retained the traditional organisation of Church government, and claimed that this was a just and lawful order; and in the Preface to the Ordination services it claims that this was based upon the example of the Apostolic Church. And with this order it retained many customs and observances, of which some were set aside by some of the Reformed Churches. But the representative writers of the Church of England did not consider themselves to be separated from the Reformed Churches by any barriers of doctrine. Let me read to you some famous words of Hooker upon the controversy with regard to the nature of the sacrament of the Holy Communion.

"This was it that some did exceedingly fear, lest Zwinglius and Œcolampadius would bring to pass, that men should account of this sacrament, but only as of a shadow, destitute, empty, and void of Christ. But seeing that by opening the several opinions which have been held, they are grown, for aught I can see, on all sides at the length to a general agreement concerning that which alone is material,

[1] Jewel, *Defence of the Apology*, Cambridge, 1848, p. 213.

namely, the real participation of Christ and of life in His body and blood by means of this sacrament; wherefore should the world continue still distracted and rent with so manifold contentions, when there remaineth now no controversy, saving only about the subject where Christ is? Yea, even in this point no man denieth but that the soul of man is the receptacle of Christ's presence." [1]

Here, then, is the fundamental fact about the historical position of the Church of England, that it conceived itself to be united with the Reformed Churches of Europe, not only negatively as repudiating the supremacy of Rome, but much more positively, as holding with them that the centre of the Christian life lies in the experience of the human heart, of the reconciliation of man to God through that faith which forgets the poor and humble goodness which is in ourselves, and lives upon the reality of God's forgiveness and grace.

It is out of this fundamental unity that there naturally arose the intimate relations of friendship and communion between the Church of England and the Reformed Churches. Let me again remind you that, while many Anglicans in the seventeenth century began to move away from the position of the sixteenth century, even then—even in the height of the struggle with other forms of religious organisation in England—the leaders even of the new

[1] Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, v. 67. 2.

movement continued to recognise the close relation of the English Church with the Reformed Churches: such a man as Cosin plainly urged upon English Churchmen that they should communicate with the French Reformed Church.

It is no doubt true that as time passed these relations became less intimate, that the reformed Church of England and the Reformed Churches in Europe gradually fell apart, though it must be remembered that at no time has there been any formal or official determination of the old and natural relation of friendship and sympathy. The religious life and literature of England and of the reformed countries have always continued to be closely related, and to exercise upon each other a very powerful and intimate influence. But it re-remains that we have to a certain extent fallen apart: the causes of this are complex.

No doubt one great cause of this has been the fact that the progress of nationalism, which was for a moment arrested or delayed by the Reformation, has resumed its inevitable course; the European nationalities have been in the last four centuries rapidly developing their various characteristics; and in religion, as in the other aspects of life, it has been difficult to retain the sense of unity. I think, however, that it is true to say that, until well on in the nineteenth century, no English Churchmen would have dreamed of turning

to the Roman Catholic Church on the Continent rather than to the Reformed Churches; it would have seemed to them wholly unnatural, and I think that is still true of the vast majority. There is, however, no doubt that the sense of solidarity and community between the Church of England and the Reformed Churches is weaker than in the sixteenth century.

I think that this may be partly due again to the reflected influence of our own divisions in this country. The Elizabethan Englishman did not recognise as real or permanently significant the tendencies to division which from the beginning existed in the reformed Church of England. I do not indeed suppose that any religious party in the country at first thought of a continuing division in religious opinion and organisation. The intolerance of different schools was in large measure the natural condition of men to whom the notion of varieties of religious organisation and beliefs within one community was a thing strange and unfamiliar. It was only after a long struggle, after a hundred years of alternating power in different schools of religion, that Englishmen slowly and reluctantly acquiesced in the permanent existence of different religious societies in the one country; and unhappily the memories of that hundred years' struggle were hard and bitter, and led men for a long time to overstate rather than to understate their actual differences.

I venture to think that we shall be brought together again by the gradual influence of the same principle which united the Reformed Churches in the sixteenth century. I venture to think that it is just the revived and growing sense of the supreme significance of the religious experience in the human soul, which will bring Christian men in this country together, as it is indeed doing already. For I think that once again English Christians have come through a common experience, that once again religion in this country has been quickened and revived under the terms of a movement which has affected us all.

The careless observer may find in the great movement of the eighteenth century only a temporary and superficial revival of religion, and may even think it mainly remarkable as leading to a further division among Christian men. I think that if we look closer we shall recognise in the Methodist and Evangelical revival the beginnings of a movement whose greater effects we are only just beginning to see.

What was the real meaning of the great Methodist movement, of the Evangelical revival in the Church of England and the Free Churches? What was it but the recovery of the fundamental idea of the sixteenth century?—the recovery, under the new terms of conviction of sin and conversion, of the conception of a religion of experience. The history of that which was, to John Wesley,

the beginning of a new life, is singularly illuminating.

For many years before the day of what he looked upon as his conversion, he and his friends in Oxford had been striving for the attainment of a deeper and better religious life. The little society of Methodists who met at Lincoln College and in other places strove to make their life and religion real. They revived the rule of prayer and meditation; they spent their time in visiting the sick and the needy and the prisoner; they turned from what seemed to them the vanities and noise of the world, that they might find and serve God. But it was not there nor thus that John Wesley, as he thought, found the light; but among the Moravians in London, those Moravians who had maintained and revived something of the simplicity of the life of faith and illumination. It was in the doctrine of the forgiveness and peace which is in faith in Jesus Christ and His cross, that John Wesley found the light. And it was in that light, and by the power of this experience, that he turned England upside down.

Again it might seem to the hasty observer as though this movement only affected a section of English Christianity, and that it produced a further division among Christian men. The Methodist Society endeavoured to find a place in the Church of England, but finally became a separate organisation. And it is no doubt true that the effects of

the movement were for a long time confined to the Free Churches, and to a comparatively small section of the Church of England. But the truth is that these were only the first results of the movement. Gradually all this has changed.

There was a time when the characteristic ideas and phrases of the Evangelical movement were distasteful and repellent to the great majority of English Churchmen; when even good and honest men could talk contemptuously of "sanctified cobblers," and suspiciously of the conception of conversion. But all this has passed away.

I am not here considering the whole meaning and significance of the Tractarian movement. There are no doubt aspects of that great movement which have, in some degree, widened the gulf between Christian men in England; but, on the other hand, it is also true that it was through the Tractarian movement that the evangelical temper and ideas have gradually come to make their way to acceptance among the great mass of devout Church of England people. The opposition has passed away, and we now find men, who are ecclesiastically very far removed from each other, dominated by the same spirit, and even using the same languages as the just and natural embodiment of the most profound religious convictions and experience.

I venture to hope, and to believe, that in this great and profound apprehension of the spiritual

life, in this experience of the soul, we have a great and reconciling force. I think that gradually it is acting as a solvent of the spirit of separation and division. I think that even though we may yet see no clear solution of the ecclesiastical difficulties which separate men, yet we have in the religion of a common experience a power which is drawing men together, and through which in the end we may find the way of peace and brotherhood.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES

BY

JOHN OMAN, D.D.

Calvinistic doctrine — Puritan worship — National religion— Government by elders—Theory of office—The Church non-legal, apostolic, and historical.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES

From the syllabus of these lectures I might seem to be standing here as a representative of the whole body of Presbyterians. Apart from the impossibility of any one representing anything so varied, I have never attained the dignity of being representative of the smallest of Presbyterian communities. Having been so long one of the Diaspora here in England, a remnant scattered and peeled, I cannot even represent with effectiveness that spirit which unkind people would call a good conceit of ourselves, and sympathetic people a confidence in our mission, which arises from the sense of being the largest Protestant denomination. Even if the claim be true, it has become for me very distant and impersonal; but we are not without those who conceive the General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn after a Presbyterian model, with the Pope converted to the equality of the ministry and properly ordained by his brethren as moderator. Against these limitations I can only set the advantage which has come to me from spending half my life in close contact with all forms of religious life in England, and with an interest which has

never flagged. As these lectures are an attempt to express the mind of English Protestantism, that knowledge and sympathy may go far, however, to counterbalance my manifest deficiencies.

Yet this is not by way of apology for being here. For that there is only one reason. No one better could be laid hands on just at the moment. I only wish to afford you the means of checking the personal denominator, so that, if I seem to you at times to speak of Presbyterianism not as it has ever existed, but as I conceive it ought to be, you will know where you are. You must not, however, complain, because the Church, in distinction from all other societies, is primarily an ideal fellowship, and nothing is more important about any denomination than the ideal of itself which it has created in the minds of its ordinary, non-ecclesiastical members.

Four leading characters marked the old Presbyterianism. They were (1) Calvinistic Doctrine, (2) Puritan Worship, (3) National Religion, (4) Government by Elders. The simplest way of treating our subject will be to ask in succession how far these characters have been modified.

1. How far are the Presbyterian Churches still Calvinistic in doctrine ?

All English-speaking Presbyterian Churches still accept in some way the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Confession is entirely Calvinistic, its whole system being based upon a theological

doctrine of election. Nearly every Presbyterian Church, however, has in some way limited its adhesion. We here in England have attempted a shorter creed, but no other Church, so far as I know, has followed our example. The usual method has been to accept the Confession with a declaration of the sense in which it is understood and the extent to which it is taken. In some cases an extreme doctrine of election has been definitely excluded, and even where that has not been done, the effect is in every case the same. The result has been a greater modification of the whole creed than any of the Churches have so far realised.

Yet the change is not to be interpreted as if it meant that something more Arminian had been preferred to the old Calvinism, as if the emphasis in salvation has been transferred somewhat from God and placed more on human co-operation. The ground tone of the piety remains unaltered. An evangelicalism which seeks assurance either in our own emotion or in our own action is still alien to the people who give religious character to the Presbyterian Churches. For their own salvation, as for all else, the instinct of devout souls is to fall back on God simply and in grave silence. You may think that that merely describes the instinct of all genuine piety, but the difference between this type and that, say, which is bred by the Methodist evangel or the High Church discipline is easy to feel, if not to express.

What has come to pass is the recognition that the hard and precise theological doctrine of the Confession is not an adequate expression of that temper. It was an attempt to give dogmatic definiteness to the Creed, dogmatic authority to the faith, dogmatic finality to salvation, the desire for which men had brought with them out of the Church of Rome. In theology, if not in religion, it made God's omniscience and omnipotence the last words in His relation to man. The difference is that we have come to realise that in a relation so personal as man's dependence upon God the last words are love and patience, and that that is far too great a matter to be expressed in any formula. But there is no sense that the dependence on God is less or that it would be better expressed by assigning so much to God and so much to man.

2. With the Puritanism of our worship it might seem that time has dealt still more hardly.

Are we not in architecture much like our neighbours, limited in display only by lack of means, and alas! not always by that? Have we not acres of stained glass, mediaeval in everything but quality? What hymn books contain more elaborate music? Are not good organs more common among us than good organists? Is it not whispered that some among us use a liturgy which only want of power, not want of will, makes less stately than better-known forms of common prayer? Have not various Presbyterian Churches published forms of worship which

are not more widely used only because they do not deserve to be ?

In all this we are not different from other Puritan Churches. And the causes are the same—partly failure to realise the aim of Puritanism in subordinating the Church as a building and a ritual to the Church as a society and a life, and partly a success which tends to defeat itself. When the fervour of the religious impulse of Puritanism had cooled, the asceticism and self-discipline it had taught men were applied to the business of succeeding in life. Consequently a very large number of our people have, mainly through education and self-denial, prospered in the world. The result is a highly respectable and in many ways most admirable person whose position in our churches, however, is apt to be determined more by his purse than his piety. Partly he has old troublesome associations which upbraid a selfish prosperity, and make him feel more comfortable in his own spacious home when he has helped to build a stately house of prayer. If he is a religious person, which is usually the case, he does not want to live in a ceiled house while the temple of God lies desolate ; if he is not, he still wants to have his church, like everything about him, up to the mark. Where his money is spent in really beautiful architecture, which alas ! is seldom the case, it may be regarded as in the same class of offerings as the "spikenard very precious," and the poorest need not be hindered from entering its

portals. Where it is mere display and upholstery, not only Puritanism but every right instinct should regard it as an abomination in the sight of God. Then the only excuse is that in comparison with the rest of the life it is in a measure unselfish expenditure, and is at worst some training in generosity.

The same principle applies to the forms of prayer. It would depend on the kind of forms, not on forms as such whether the use of them were a denial of Puritanism. Forms of prayer at least are not new in Presbyterianism, only there is perhaps something not very congenial to them in its atmosphere, and it is very doubtful whether at the present day the employment of them tends to increase. Yet if the habit of family prayer, which really is assumed as the preparation for our method of public worship, decreases as rapidly as it appears to be doing, the necessity of a stated form of worship will no doubt be more and more felt. In any case, the right to use forms belongs to our freedom as well as the right to do without them.

When we say that none of these things touch the heart of our Puritanism, we mean that we have not modified our view that the Church is not the edifice, but the communion of saints; that its glory is not in any outward splendour, but in the souls it calls into the fellowship of Christ; that the test of its success is not ritual, but humble, patient, steadfast lives; that its task is not to exalt itself at all, but to serve the community, and that it must ever

be ready to decrease if thereby Christ increase. A sensuous impression, even the highest, is not in our view either pleasing to God or creative of genuine religious impulse. The essence of worship is, we believe, to pray with the understanding, and to that end the task is to persuade us by the truth and not merely arrest us by outward impressiveness. Whether, if we were better people and realised our own views more clearly, some more of our money would not find its way into more spiritual channels than even ecclesiastical bricks and mortar, remains a grave question; but, in any case, if Christianity is not primarily concerned with humble fellowship in the truth, and succeeds best through a stately religious ceremonial and much outward impressiveness, it can have very little use for Presbyterianism.

3. Closely connected with the Puritanism of Presbyterianism is its idea of National Religion.

Has not this suffered a still greater change? Only the Church of Scotland remains a State Church among all the Presbyterian Churches of the English-speaking races, and it stands face to face with an equally powerful organisation which has ever more and more clearly denied in principle the whole idea of a State Church. Moreover, where is the Presbyterian Church which even dreams of including the whole community in its doctrine and discipline like our forefathers of the seventeenth century?

The Puritan conception of a National Church

sprang from the belief that the true religious life is just the secular life rightly lived, that the only treasure of the Church is God's Word, and that its task is not to build up splendour of religious ceremonial, but humbly to persuade men to peace with God, and thereby to render the highest of all services to the community. The Presbyterian of the seventeenth century, as much as the Episcopalian, identified the Church in circumference with the baptized State, but he differed from men like Hooker in maintaining that they were not identified in principle. In principle the Church was the fellowship of the elect. They alone gave it reality and power. On their spirit and method it should be organised. Its whole task was to serve the civil community, but not on the same principle as the State. Wherefore, the State did not require to make the Church a great secular institution, nor did the Church require to be, in its own territory, under the tutelage of the State. Therefore, in practical result no Presbyterian Church ever was a State Church in the same sense as the Lutheran or Anglican, and most Presbyterian Churches have come to maintain that the method of the State and the method of the Church cannot with profit to either be combined.

When we were obstinately refusing to see where our own principles were leading us, Congregationalism arose and said, "We must proceed with a true Church, however few, without tarrying for

any." That was a right and Christian thing to say, and through stress of circumstances, if not through insight, all Churches to-day have more or less come to the same result. But the question is what this True Church is to proceed to do, and with all our blundering we have, I venture to think, with native obstinacy, stuck to that better than Congregationalism.

There may only be a remnant according to election who save the Church, but they are to be the servant of the Lord to save the whole people. In that case a Church should in some practical way be a national Church, with a sense of responsibility for the nation's poorest and most degraded, for the small places as well as the great, for national well-being of all kinds, and for carrying out in the world at large national responsibility.

The non-established Presbyterians, who to-day are the vast majority, refuse to be dependent on the State because they think the true principle of the Church would thereby be compromised, and the national life worse served, but the ultimate rationale of their Presbyterian organisation is its efficacy for national service.

One illuminating example is our own small Church in England, where our attempt to be a national Church may resemble the inflation of the fabled frog, though our failure is not due to our smallness but to the commercial success of the better-educated Scot, which in spite of us has too

much drawn us away from being what all other Presbyterian Churches are, a Church of the common people.

The most conspicuous example of success, at least outside of America, is the United Free Church of Scotland, which is a national Church as truly as any State Church in Christendom, and there are few questions more important than whether she will have enough patience, humility, absence of legal rule, and power to discriminate between the temporal and the spiritual, to make her a blessing, not a menace, in a free and self-governing State.

4. The system of government by elders, which I here treat only in the last place, may seem to you the only really distinguishing feature of our system. Does not Presbyterianism mean simply government by presbyters?

But it is not government by elders alone which distinguishes Presbyterianism. It is government by presbyters under Calvinistic and Puritan ideas and for national ends.

The seventeenth century heard the claim of divine right for presbyters, and perhaps you know that there have arisen in our day those who claim for us orders and apostolic succession. But a question which elsewhere has stirred interest to the depths, has left our calm unruffled. Is it that we are too modest to insist on the claim or too well instructed to believe in it? But we should not think it true modesty to fail to lay claim to any-

thing that was good, and when there were some eight hundred bishops in the Province of Africa in the fifth century they must have been a great deal more like Presbyterian ministers than Anglican metropolitans. The true reason is that we regard such a guarantee of the ministry as external and material, and we seek it in a quite different, and in our view a higher, principle. A Catholic Ecclesia, a Church in its wholeness, we acknowledge wherever two or three are met in the name of Christ. That, and that alone, we acknowledge as fully as our Congregational brethren, both adequately and exclusively constitutes a Church of Christ. There its truth, its worship, its fellowship, its witness and service are all represented. All believers are priests qualified to appear before God both for themselves and for their brethren, called to manifest the word of reconciliation and peace with their lives, if not with their utterance, able in some way to admonish one another, and, if need arose and the order of the Church were not disturbed thereby, qualified to administer any Christian ordinance. The minister is not the substitute for this priesthood of all believers, but the organ of it, and that on Luther's ground, that what belongs to all cannot be exercised except by one chosen in some way by all to represent them.

On this question of representation nearly all our divisions have arisen. Direct election by the congregation was not always insisted on. Even a

patron could be tolerated so long as he would be the vehicle of this choice and did not use his position merely to advance his dependents. But the conviction that election was the natural and right expression of this view was so strong that in the end it has abolished patronage even in the State Church. Yet our idea of election is not democratic in the strict sense. It is not that every hearer has a right to choose his teacher. No minister or elder is truly called except God call him, and God does not call him unless he have the gifts of knowledge or prudence, of prophecy or influence which may enable him to fulfil his office. But every member of the Church in full communion, being, *ex hypothesi*, a saint in the old sense of the word, one, that is, who lays himself open to the Spirit of God, has the gift of discerning spiritual gifts and can, however poor and humble and ignorant he be, learn the mind of the Spirit in the matter. In strict theory no man, whatever his preparation, is a minister except by the call of the Spirit through the people to represent their universal priesthood.

That view, of course, is not confined to us but is fundamental to Protestantism, and the only difference in the matter is that our people have perhaps made more of the idea of doing everything in order and have thereby been inclined to regard the minister, perhaps too exclusively, as the organ of their priesthood. For example, it has been the uniform custom for the minister when present to

preside at all meetings except for business of a strictly financial kind, and, above all, to preside at the administration of the sacraments, even though in theory the elder is as much a presbyter and true bishop of the flock as he.

No part of our system is more characteristic of it than the eldership. Its concern is with the spiritual work of the church, with visiting the sick and the indifferent, and, as occasion offers, keeping in touch with all the members in a district. The elders, met in session, receive members and occasionally remove them, distribute the elements at the Communion, have a veto on all use of the church buildings which might not be consistent with the ends of a Christian church, and, where they do not share in the temporal management, they appoint the collections for benevolent objects and administer the alms of the congregation. These objects on the whole they carry out effectively. The idea that they shall also be leaders in prayer and care of the young and in initiating all good works is, however, very variously realised, sometimes well and sometimes not at all. Still, all who know them would, I think, bear witness to their sincerity and wisdom and weight of character, and when I think of the unfailing help I received from my own, I scarce realise how a congregation is carried on without them.

For the most part Plato's idea of office has been well fulfilled, that only those who shrink from

office should be allowed to rule. Here our idea of office in the Church comes in. We do not say, Will you be a candidate for the people's suffrage, and have the honour of being their representative ? We say, Your brethren after thought and prayer have decided that you most of all have the gifts for this office, and you must consider whether that is not a call of God which you may not refuse. Office in the Church is thus not representation of the people, but representation of the Divine mind, which it is the duty of the people to take part in discovering. It is not their part to choose representatives, but to discover leaders, and still less is it their part to control them except in so far as the meeting of the whole congregation, being itself the highest expression of the mind of the Spirit, is also the highest appeal.

Even in financial management this is still our idea, and some congregations express it by ordaining their managers as deacons. The idea that he who pays the piper shall call the tune is foreign to all our principles, whatever defects may have crept into our practice. Such an idea of giving would deprive it of all religious value. A man should give simply as part of his stewardship over the gifts God has entrusted to him, but quite other gifts may be required for the Church's administration. Why should the gifts pass through the Church at all, if not to have some one stand between giver and receiver, so that the one may give simply as his

duty, and the other receive simply as his right? That was the principle of the Free Church of Scotland Sustentation Fund, but it is also in some form the principle of all kinds of help given by richer congregations to poorer in every Presbyterian Church. That is the principle also of passing all gifts within the congregation, such as those for the poor, through the Church. I have known people who would far rather have starved than receive poor relief, accept without the slightest sense of dependence help thus conveyed.

In theory, that is still our view. In practice, this commercial age is sometimes too strong for us. Lists of subscriptions let everybody's left hand know what every one else's right hand does, and large subscribers become prominent, and, not being elected elders or not being willing to accept office, think they should have influence in other ways. But there are still congregations which act on the old ideas and do not suffer from it even in material things. Probably the chief cause of the change is simply a loss of faith in truly Christian motive. Yet, this is to be said for us, a poor man is still as likely to be made an elder as a rich, and we have never used financial aid to coerce in any degree the smallest congregation.

On the eldership all further organisation rests. Every congregation sends its minister and one or two elders to the local presbytery. In the larger churches several presbyteries send repre-

sentatives to a synod, and then there is a General Assembly, sometimes, I believe, made up from presbyteries or synods, and sometimes from a proportion of the congregations in rotation. In the smaller bodies the supreme court is a synod to which all the congregations send a minister and an elder. This court, whether synod or assembly, decides finally all appeals, every member having a right of access to it. It directs all the general enterprises of the Church, and it alone has a right to make any change in the constitution or the creed, and then only after consulting the eldership of all the congregations, whose duty it is to ascertain the mind of the people. On the finding of the majority of congregations it may not act, but it must not act without knowing what that finding is.

Here our real difference from Congregationalism begins, because the difference in the organisation of the congregation is mainly a question of names. The Congregationalist view rests, or at least did at first rest, on the conviction that all right government in the Church is exclusively by the exercise of God's Word. It was held that as this could not go beyond one assembly for worship, one gathering with Christ and His Word in the midst of it, such rule could not be wider than the congregation. Perhaps there was also a general feeling that such restriction of rule would forward true unity, would, considering how much men are driven apart by the violent desire to unite them, alone forward true unity.

Now the fundamental thing about the order of the Church is that it ought to be non-legal, the government of each man by the Spirit of God and organisation through love. It is not the government of one man by another and organisation through compulsion. The unit of it is the two or three freely met in Christ's name, and all wider co-ordination of it must be on the same principle of free association. Moreover, the rule of God to which all churches should be subjected may possibly never in this world be an ecclesiastical construction, may not indeed begin truly to exist till we are content to have love as the one bond of perfectness.

Further, there can be no doubt that this wider organisation has been used as mere organised force to compel a union which has not been Christian fellowship, and which, when responsibility is properly assigned, must be regarded as the cause of all the divisions of Christendom. Nor do I wish to deny that our Church courts have been used in a legal spirit—our common creed sometimes falling short of being a common faith, and rights of office and property receiving too much consideration. This legal temper was at one time the cause and the justification for the rise of Independency; and I cannot be sure, seeing how much unnecessary law there was on both sides in the recent Free Church of Scotland case, that we have quite lived that temper down. But, the question is whether these evils do not belong to unregenerate human nature

and not to the system, and whether a rejection of this wider organisation is so much an escape from temptation as is supposed. Are the smaller congregations freer from compulsion from their stronger neighbours ? Am I altogether wrong in the impression I have occasionally gathered that the restriction of the rule within the congregation does not necessarily ensure that it shall be wholly by God's Word, which, being rightly interpreted, I take to mean wholly by the appeal to truth and the spirit of love ? The historical need of the protest against our temper is beyond all question, but in rejecting the method with the temper, has there not been something of what the Germans call throwing out the child with the bath ? It is the spirit, not the extent of the rule, that matters. And if the only right spirit is the humble appeal to truth and love, why should it not link society to society as well as individual to individual ? Surely the rule of God's Word in that sense can be as wide as Christian association in faith and good works ; whereas, if it is the kind of rule which is wrong, it may be no more right in a congregation than in a wider sphere. What leads to the restricted notion of government by the Word is the conception of it as preaching on infallible Scripture which is thought of as a legislation. If it is simply the appeal to truth and the spirit of love, the restriction disappears of itself.

While we Presbyterians are far from having over-

come our whole error, we can claim that increasingly our presbyteries and assemblies have attended to matters in which there could be nothing but willing co-operation. Heresy hunts and visitations except for encouragement have died away. Helping the weaker causes, home missions, foreign missions, the care of the young, the training of the ministry, the state of religion, and occasionally matters of public morality now occupy almost exclusively their attention, and when they decide matters either for individuals or for congregations, their finding has no force except the benefit to be derived from belonging to their larger association, and, as I have said, no decision is ever enforced by the power of the purse, or I think one can say by any kind of social ostracism.

The question, therefore, is whether we have not now come to the point where the watchwords of Congregationalism and Presbyterianism should no longer divide us; where we Presbyterians should admit that all rule in the Christian Church should be non-legal, and Congregationalists should admit that that is an affair of the spirit and temper of a rule, not of the size of its sphere.

From this it is plain that no system belongs to the being of the Church. At most it is concerned with the well-being. Nay in itself, and apart from the spirit in which it is employed, it does not even belong to the well-being. The West-

minster Confession says that a church may become a synagogue of Satan. Nor will Presbyterianism or any other form of church government by itself save it. The Church consists of what the Church of England Articles call congregations of faithful, that is of believing men, among whom the Word of God is preached and the sacraments rightly administered. That is to say, it consists of those to whom God's pardon and grace are realities. Not by any human discipline may the attempt be made to reduce the Church to such persons. The utmost any discipline may attempt is to exclude those who cannot on any judgment of charity be included. Yet that fellowship of believing men is the Church both in principle and in power. It consists of those truly met in Christ's name, however few. The founding of the Church was not the creation of an organisation with rulers and subjects. On the contrary, it was the founding of a society which was to shun the authority of one man over another by which worldly societies prevail. Its rules are that the first is to be last and the last first, and that no one is to be called Rabbi, for all are brethren and all alike have one Divine teacher. Its supreme ordinance was a Supper appointed on the eve of the crucifixion to associate men as brethren in the discovery that service and suffering, and not human rule, are the mighty things in God's kingdom. It is a society, in short, of the rule of God, and that means a rule exclusively

of love, a rule in which each one finding his Father in heaven also finds his brother upon earth.

Fundamentally, then, and in principle, the Church is a non-legal rule in which every endeavour after order must be an appeal to love, so that, when division and trouble arise, every appeal is unworthy except to the heart of our brethren. In short, it is here to establish God's final rule of freedom and love which are the same thing, and to teach men that compulsions of all kinds, even in the State, are merely preparatory, educative, and temporal. We must ever recognise that this rule, by humble service, is far more important than whether the ruler is a deacon, an elder, or a bishop.

Such a Church is founded upon the apostles and prophets. But that is not a traditional idea. It does not mean any material succession of laying-on of hands, which to us at least is a conception worldly and unspiritual. It does not mean that the God the apostles saw directly we see indirectly, or that we can only know His will for them and not for us. On the contrary, it means that through them we also can be apostles and prophets, conscious that God is working out a great purpose through His people, and believing that it is not by might, nor by power, but by God's Spirit, that it is to be brought to pass.

Such an apostolic and prophetic Church is necessarily historical, but that is because it is occupied in a historical task, not merely because it has a historical ancestry. The Church is historical because

it is prophetic; that is to say, because age by age it must take up its task where it finds it, assured of learning God's purpose in it, and trusting only in the Divine method of truth and love whatsoever difficulties and discouragements may arise. The whole Christian view is reversed when the Church is held to be a prophetic society because it is a historic society, as if we were to be children of Abraham after the flesh and not after his faith. It is a historical society because it has a revelation of God, which is to say, an ever-fuller manifestation of God's eternal order of love and freedom, of which Jesus is not only the fountain-head but the abiding inspiration. It is also a historical society in the sense that we have to take up the task of applying this revelation at the point we find it, accepting responsibility for past failures and defects, as well as inheriting the gains and victories of the past. Usually that means taking it up in the society which has made us what we are, and which we should not leave except for strong spiritual convictions. It is also a historical society in the sense that we may not seek to cut ourselves off from the influences of our time, intellectual, social, or political, for it is in this age God has placed us, and it is this age we are to serve.

By realising this position we shall serve in our own denomination, but only for the sake of the whole, as we should serve in our own regiment for the sake of the empire; and it ought to be our endeavour

never to be indifferent to any society in which sincere Christians may be toiling, nor ever to feel alienated from them because their sincerity leads them to different convictions from ours. Thus we shall surmount our divisions by something more inspiring than ecclesiastical compromise, something more apostolic than the averaging of our individuality, whether in belief or organisation.

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES

BY

F. J. POWICKE, PH.D.

1. Congregational Idea of the Church.
   (*a*) Its sanction in the New Testament.
   (*b*) Its emergence in "Brownism."
2. The Spirituality of the Brownist Movement.
3. How its "Separatist" Aspect gave way to the Congregationalist and the Catholic.
4. Two Things seen from the First.
   (*a*) True relation of the ministry to the Church.
   (*b*) Necessity for a pure fellowship.
5. Attitude of Congregationalism to—
   (*a*) The Sacraments.
   (*b*) Church polity.
   (*c*) The State.
   (*d*) Creeds.
   (*e*) Missions.
6. Congregationalism essentially Social and Fraternal.
7. What it has Given and Gained.

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES

Dr. R. W. Dale, in an essay written nearly forty years ago,[1] closes with a statement of what he considered to be "the distinctive function" of Congregationalists.

It was, he thought, not the work of Evangelisation, for that is the work alike of all Christians; still less was it the work of testifying against the evils, real or supposed, of other Churches—for example, the evil of "ecclesiastical establishments"; nor was it the work of reconstructing theological science, or taking a chief place in the controversy with unbelief. All such work may form a part of their duty, and sometimes an inevitable part. But their distinctive function is "to reveal and to realise the true idea of the Church."

i. Here it is assumed that there is but one legitimate idea of the Church, and that this is identical with that which Congregationalists exist to maintain and express. Such a claim may seem to some rather audacious, if not insolent. And so it would be if it were said that Congregationalists have a monopoly of the idea. But, of course, he and we say

[1] *Essays and Addresses* (1871), p. 176.

nothing so inept. On the contrary, it is gladly admitted that the Idea is a common possession of all Christian people, and that the perception of it has never been quite lost among any.

We could, for example, hardly desire a better statement of the idea than is given in the following words: "The idea of a Church—as conceived in its most general form—is this, that it widens life by deepening the sense of brotherhood; that it teaches, strengthens, and propagates ideas by enshrining truth in living witnesses . . . and that it expands and deepens worship by eliminating all that is selfish and narrow, and giving expression to common aims and feelings." But these are the words of Dr. Walter Lock in his *Lux Mundi* essay on the Church, and he goes on to show that, in its Christian form, the Church answers completely to this idea. For it consists of persons who "continue to draw out and express in their common life the perfection that was in Christ"; who expound and propagate the "truths about God and His relation to human nature" which Christ revealed; and who present unto God the sacrifice of a pure, spiritual worship. It is a supernatural society anticipated and intended by Jesus, but formally created on the Day of Pentecost. On that day "the Church was formed in becoming the possessor of a common corporate life." This life was the life of Christ, given by the Spirit to the whole body of Christians together. He is the Vine;

they are the branches. They draw all their life from Him. Apart from Him, they can do nothing. If in union with Him, they bear fruit.

Other metaphors suggest the same fact of corporate life. "The Church is a household, a scene of active work, of skilled and trained activity"; "it is a family in which 'all ye are brethren,' laying obligations of love between brother and brother, calling out self-sacrifice for the good of others, deepening in each the sense of the value of the lives of others."

"It is the body of Christ, that which grows stronger and stronger, that which draws its life from Him, and must hold to Him." . . . "It is God's temple, made up of parts which are fitted in to one another in symmetry." . . . "It is the Bride of Christ, the dearest object of Christ's love, which gives herself to Him for His service, which for His sake keeps herself pure in life and doctrine." Such language well describes what is meant by "the Communion of Saints"; and the communion of saints is at bottom what all Christians understand by the Church.

There is no Evangelical Christian but believes that Jesus meant to form a Church, that He meant it to consist of His true disciples, that when these meet in His name He is in the midst of them, that His immanent presence is the spring of their life, and that life in Him makes them one body. Nor is there any Evangelical Christian but believes that

such a communion of saints is the Church's essential note. But while this is so, it is certain that the idea of the Church as a *simple* communion of saints has had a hard fight for life. We find it radiant in the New Testament; we find it obscured almost to the point of extinction by the end of the third century. Its place has been taken by ideas practically fatal to it.

How the transition came about is a question on which we do not need here to dwell.

Henry Barrow ascribed[1] the change to a "superstitious reverence and preposterous estimation of their teachers" on the part of the people—together with the natural craving of governors for increased authority. It is more likely to have arisen from a combination of circumstances in which conscious purpose played a very subordinate part. But let us beware of a fallacy. Our reverence for "God in history" may easily induce the notion that all changes which can be called (in any sense) natural are normal. We may fail to see that changes are normal, are a true development, only so far as they at once conserve and expand the essential type or idea of that from which they start. Changes which involve a loss, or reversal, of the original idea are abnormal, however excellent the result may seem to be. If what began as a democracy ends as a despotism you may say that the latter is a superior form of government to the former; but you cannot

[1] *Briefe Discoverie of the False Church* (1590), p. 3.

fairly say that it is a legitimate outcome of the former. Even so if you admit that the New Testament idea of the Church is a redeemed people, all kingly and priestly in functions, you must admit that the historic process which turned it into a society ruled and ministered to by a spiritual oligarchy of priestly office went wrong somehow; and if you still speak of the process as a true development you must show that the idea of the Church as a redeemed people is not really in the New Testament after all.

It is the belief of Congregationalists that what may be called the ecclesiastical disfranchisement of the people was a radical departure from the mind of Christ and the practice of the primitive Church, and has been a source of manifold evils. It is also their belief that, to them, in the providence of God, has been committed the task of restoring to its central place the idea of the Church as essentially a redeemed people, who in virtue of a common direct relation to Christ are spiritually equal among themselves and endowed by Him with all the rights and powers which He meant His Church to possess.

ii. Although this idea first came to conscious expression as modern English Congregationalism in the early days of Elizabeth, Dr. Mackennal is right when he says [1] that we may find anticipations of it in Wiclif's poor priests and the disciples whom they made. These were drawn together by a

[1] *The Evolution of Congregationalism*, p. 47.

strong spirit of fellowship. They formed congregations more or less permanent; and their influence, as well as numbers, was greatest in just those parts of the land, such as East Anglia, where Congregationalism afterwards flourished most vigorously. But none of the sporadic congregations before Robert Browne (1550?–1634), with the possible exception of the one gathered by Richard Fitz (1571), though animated by the Congregational idea, were conscious of it, or knew what they were doing. We may safely speak of Browne as the first deliberate organiser of a Congregational Church in England. And it is important to note his dominant motive. He is sometimes set forth as a preacher of the doctrine that the State has nothing to do with the Church. This was not only not his primary idea, it was not his view at all. He held from first to last that "the Prince" (his usual name for the State) ought to have a care, a supreme care, for the Church. He ought to be the leader in its reform; he ought to compel its ministers, if necessary, to do their duty; he ought to protect its members in their due rights and privileges; he ought himself to obey, and see that they obeyed, the laws of Christ. What forced Browne to seem disloyal was his idea of the Church. We do not know much of his religious history; but there is evidence that, as a young man, he underwent the "great change"—he passed from death unto life—through faith in Christ. Then instinctively he

sought a congenial spiritual home. But he could find none. It was impossible for him in those days to treat Church fellowship with indifference. The notion of an isolated Christian life hardly existed. He had either to content himself with a place in the established Church, in his own parish assembly, or to face the question 'What else?' That question rose about him on all sides at Cambridge during his student days (1572–5). It received a hesitating answer from moderate Puritans; it evoked a decisive and drastic answer from Presbyterian Puritans, like Thomas Cartwright. Browne judged both answers in the light of what he had learnt from an independent and most thorough study of the Scriptures; and rejected both. His feeling that the Church should be a fellowship of those who had experienced the same great change as himself passed into a clear conviction. It dawned and grew upon him as a wonderful discovery that, according to the New Testament, "the Kingdom of Heaven" (as he puts it) "was not to be begun by whole parishes, but rather of the worthiest, were they never so few." In other words, the members of Christ's Kingdom must be Christians. The condition of membership was not anything national or parochial or sacramental, but something personal. It pertained to those, and those only, who could sincerely avow their faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord. This being so, it became the duty (not merely the right) of Christians to unite in visible societies. When

Browne set up such a society in Norwich (1581) the act—in his own eyes, and in the view of those who acted with him—was a moral necessity. Obedience to Christ, even more than the constraint of mutual sympathy, made it inevitable. If it was, as they profoundly believed, the will of Christ that His disciples should unite to confess Him before men and practise His precepts, there was no choice. The covenant of fidelity to their unseen Lord, and to one another, which they took, each and all with uplifted hands, was their glad response to a command which *must* be obeyed.

1. Let me emphasise this as the creative impulse of Congregationalism.

It was *not* an exhibition of self-will. It was inspired by devotion to the will of Christ.

That loyalty to Christ entailed an apparent disloyalty to the Queen was the result of circumstances. She had approved another quite different form of the Church, and demanded a degree of conformity to it which Browne and his brethren could not yield. Nor could they bring themselves, like the Puritans generally, to "tarry" in hope that the Queen might change her mind. If she delayed to accept, or refused even to tolerate, what had been revealed to them as the truth concerning the Church, their duty none the less was clear. They must make a beginning. They must separate. We cannot wonder that to those in authority the "separation" seemed seditious and

even treasonable. It was natural, moreover, that, having the law on their side, they should strive to suppress the movement by force. On the other hand, it was equally natural that those committed to the movement should try to justify it; and, to this end, should lay the main stress, at first, on the manifold corruptions, or defects, of the institution from which they had separated. In the view of Queen, statesmen, bishops, and Reformists, the Brownists were the "spawn" of anarchy in Church and State, justly to be visited by imprisonment and hanging. In the view of the Brownists the Queen's advisers were wicked persecutors, wilful rebels against Christ, blind guides, defenders of an evil system for filthy lucre's sake, tools of Antichrist. Neither side, in fact, had an eye for anything but what seemed evil in the other. The Brownist could not see the political difficulties in the way of swift reform which held the hand of the Queen and her counsellors, even if their heart had inclined thereto; nor could he see how many of his adversaries among the bishops and Puritans were men of conscience and patriotism, who longed to do the right; were troubled at heart because the right was sometimes so hard to discern; and endured sadly the evils of an imperfect Reformation for fear of graver evils that might follow consistent action. In like manner, there was none of the dominant party, not even the 'judicious Hooker,' who caught even a glimpse of the fact that the poor

Brownist or Barrowist was an idealist to whom a vision of surpassing beauty had been opened—an idealist whose love of Queen and country was as strong and pure as his own, but who found himself driven by conscience along a path which seemed disloyal or fanatically perverse. Perhaps the mutual misunderstanding was excusable under the circumstances. But there is surely less excuse for us if we perpetuate it. We at least are in a position which enables us to recognise the real issue and its gravity. It was not a question of the right to 'separate' for matters of ceremony, or doctrine, or discipline. It was a question of the Church itself. What IS the Church? What is essential to it? Is any particular polity essential? Are bishops or elders essential? Is this or that order of service essential? Or, in truth, is nothing essential except the Christian character and relationship of the people? Nothing else, said Browne, Barrow, Robinson, and their comrades. All their negatives sprang out of this fundamental positive. In the words of Browne: "The Church planted or gathered is a Company, or number, of Christians or believers which by a willing covenant with their God are under the Government of God and Christ, and keep His laws in one Holy communion." Here is no mention of anything but Christians or believers. It is these who make the Church; and the Church thus made "is a supernatural society." Not too strongly does Dr. Dale express their thought

as follows: 'It is the permanent home of God. It is consecrated by the Real Presence of Christ. The awful splendour which dwelt in the Holy of Holies was but the symbol and prophecy of a more august manifestation of God in the Church. When its members are assembled together in Christ's name they have not merely the written records of His earthly ministry to guide, instruct, console, and animate them; Christ Himself is among them. Nor does He stand apart from them, isolated in His Divine Majesty. The decisions of the Church are sanctioned by His authority. Its prayers are made His own. 'For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.' It was for this lofty conception of the functions of the Church that the early Congregationalists endured imprisonment, exile, death. Poor men and poor women were inspired by it with the courage of heroes and the endurance of martyrs. They, too, had seen the Holy City, the 'New Jerusalem coming down from God out of Heaven,' with its gates of pearl, its foundations of precious stones, and the nations of the saved walking in its golden streets. It was a glorious vision, worth suffering for, worth dying for." [1]

2. Robert Browne, at one time, and after him other leaders,—such as Henry Barrow, John Greenwood, Henry Ainsworth,—thought it necessary to guard

[1] "Congregationalism," p. 214 (in *Essays and Addresses*).

their position by a doctrine of extreme rigour. They taught that the 'saints' must consort in worship only with the saints. There must not be even an occasional attendance at the parish church, or any church except of their own order. Such attendance involved the risk of infection by the evils, and of punishment with the plagues, of Antichrist. There are cases on record of severe censures against those who infringed this rule, and cases more than one of excommunication. The rule held good in some Separatist circles, far down into the seventeenth century. A faint tradition of it attached to Independency here and there almost into our own time. We may read in connection with not a few Independent Churches of the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries, stories which illustrate the feeling that to be present in an Established Church was to be chargeable with spiritual laxity. It was, of course, a sad mistake, and so far from being consistent with the true idea of the Church was its contradiction. For if a Church consist of those who share the same Christian life—if the life is what matters most—then its members must be in spiritual communion with every one in whom that life is present. The idea is as Catholic as the life. No doubt the communion comes to its best and fullest expression in a society of the like-minded; but it reaches out to all who possess the life, whether they be of the Society or no. And so a refusal to join with the Established Church at

any time, or in any of its acts of public worship, could be warranted only on the ground that it was in no sense or degree a Church at all; but was utterly corrupt in all its members. Unhappily this was the ground sometimes actually taken. Henry Barrow's *Briefe Discoverie of the False Church*, for example, is an elaborate attempt to make it good. Even John Robinson, in his early days, was vehemently in agreement with him.

3. There came a time, however, when, with the clearer insight begotten of a calmer environment in Holland and of a wider experience, Robinson, at any rate, gained a freer outlook. He never ceased to be a Separatist in the sense that he felt bound on the one hand to withdraw from what he described as "the hierarchical order of Church Government and ministry and appurtenances thereof," and, on the other, to unite "in the order and ordinances instituted by Christ, the only King and Lord of His Church, and by all His disciples to be observed." But he learnt to say that he stood in "all Christian fellowship" with true Christians everywhere, and could "express the same" "in all outward actions and exercises of religion, lawful and lawfully done."[1]

Robinson's attitude in this respect quickly became that of the great majority. It marked what has been called the second stage of Congregationalism, and has been the prevailing attitude of Congrega-

[1] *Works*, vol. iii. pp. 377, 378.

tionalists ever since—both in England and America. It means that they hail as brethren all true Christians, regarding differences of creed or polity, however great, as of secondary importance compared with the uniting life.[1] Their churches are a perpetual witness to their belief that union can be in nothing but the life of Christ, and that schism lies in nothing but the temper or the teaching which raises outward barriers between those whom the life inwardly unites.[2] I do not say that Congregationalists have been, or are, always true to their own principle. But it *is* their principle that unity of life is the only real unity; and that, if the life of Christ could obtain free and unfettered exercise it would gradually unite all Christians by destroying the very roots of division, and would issue at length in a visible "unity amid variety" which would fulfil Christ's prayer—"that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee."

4. We have just seen that the early Congregationalists did not always apprehend the logic of their position. But there were two things they saw clearly from the first.

(*a*) One was the true relation of the official ministry to the Church. Pastors, teachers, elders, deacons, were not a "clergy." Their office was conferred upon them by the collective voice of the people on account of evident fitness for specific

[1] See detached note on "The Apologetical Narration."

[2] A. J. Scott, *Discourses*, pp. 265, 266.

duties. It entitled them to due respect, but it did not render their person more sacred than the rest of the brethren; did not relegate these to a lower plane as laymen; did not advance them in any way except in means and opportunities of service. The Church under Christ was a democracy. Its will was the will of Christ—Christ in the midst. Its officers, therefore, must hold an executive, not a legislative, position. Their decisions might be wise and good; but the final decision must rest with the commonalty of the Church. They could advise and counsel, exhort and entreat, but they could not dictate. Acts of discipline, especially, must proceed from the sanctified conscience of the whole Church, and they must be content to submit their own conduct to the same judgment. This position was considered as dangerous as it was novel by outsiders and by some inside, at first. There was a fierce contention over it in the exiled London Church at Amsterdam, early in the reign of James I. Francis Johnson, the pastor, who had been a Presbyterian minister, practically reverted to Thomas Cartwright's view that the Elders—a name for the whole official ministry—though elected by the Church—were elected to *rule* the Church. He went the length of maintaining that the command "Tell it to the Church" meant "Tell it to the Elders." He would have made the Eldership an *Imperium in Imperio*—with the last word in everything. On the other

hand, Henry Ainsworth, the teacher, fought with all his might for the complete autonomy of the Church. John Robinson, then in Leyden, backed him up, and both appealed for support to the first leaders, Browne and Barrow. They were right. They were right, too, in declaring that the point is vital to the Congregational case. There can be no Church if there be those in the Church who assert an independent authority over it. "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." But how can the Church be qualified to rule itself? Only on one condition, viz. that all its several wills be in harmony with the will of Christ.

(*b*) This is the second point with regard to which the early Congregationalists were clear. Hence their insistence on discipline, that is to say, on a *vigilant care for the Christian character of their communion.* At times it was misdirected and overdone, with bad results. Every one who has heard of Brownism has heard of the discipline "troubles" that split the Church at Middelburg and the Church at Amsterdam. These were made the most of by satirical observers and are apt to figure largely in what may be said by the modern critic. I think, indeed, it is still a common notion that Congregationalists spend most of their time in watching one another and correcting each his neighbours' faults. But, though often absurdly applied, the rule of discipline, with a view to purity of membership, was, and is, of the first importance. Devout members

of the Church of England have always bemoaned its want of a sufficient power to exclude openly unworthy communicants. It was a chief contention of all Puritans that means must be found to ensure some evident correspondence between the profession and conduct of Church members. Presbyterians like Thomas Cartwright made more of this, and of discipline to this end, than of anything else. But the Congregationalist *had* to insist upon it, if his idea of the Church as a communion of sincerely Christian people was to have any force. He *had* to insist that the life of the Church should be a Christian life. Moral purity was the root of its spiritual health, its singleness of eye, its power of self-control, its peace, its influence on the world. We might hesitate to say that the Congregationalist believed with the author of *Ecce Homo* that "the root of all evil in the Church" has been "the imagination that it exists for any other purpose than to foster virtue, or can be prosperous save so far as it does this." He believed that the Church exists for other purposes than merely to foster virtue. In his view it was more than an ethical society. But he knew, from what he saw around him, that the highest powers of a Church are destroyed by the condonement of moral evil; and, therefore, that the removal of this must be an object of his sedulous care. So his theory was, first of all, that entrance to the Church must be barred except to those who make a willing covenant of obedience to Christ; and that then,

in a spirit of love and meekness, its members must watch over one another, must exhort and admonish one another, and must do this publicly, as well as privately, in case of need. But his chief reliance was on the effect of fellowship in the common exercises of the Church—prayer and praise, preaching of the word, the communion of the Lord's Supper. He believed that by means of these "a spirit of discipline," due to the realised presence of the Holy Christ, could not but be fostered; hence meetings for such "exercises" took the foremost place. They were not confined to Sunday. Not seldom they came twice or thrice during the week. And whatever mistakes arose now and then in connexion with specific cases—mistakes occasioned by a too rigid conception of Christian conduct or doctrine—it is certain that far more often than not the soul of the Church became a-thrill with the sense of a quickening, cleansing, uplifting communion. Here are three testimonies, by no means singular, quoted by Dr. Mackennal:[1]—

"'If ever I saw the beauty of Zion' (said John Robinson with reference to the church meetings in Leyden), 'and the glory of the Lord filling His tabernacle, it hath been in the manifestation of the divers graces of God in the Church, in that heavenly harmony and comely order wherein, by the grace of God, we are set and walk.'

"Henry Barrow—courtier, law student, man of the world—said the same thing of the Church in

[1] *The Evolution of Congregationalism*, pp. 77–79.

London. 'The solitary and contemplative life,' said Lancelot Andrewes[1] to him when he was in gaol, 'I hold the most blessed life. It is the life I would choose.' Barrow's reply shows something of the inner life of the Church for whose sake he was suffering. 'You speak philosophically, but not Christianly. So sweet is the harmony of God's graces unto me in the congregation, and the conversation of the saints at all times, as I think myself as a sparrow on the housetop when I am exiled from them.'

"To the like effect was Dr. Dale's description of his own experience. 'To be at a church meeting—apart from any prayer that is offered, any hymn that is sung, any words that are spoken, is for me one of the chief means of grace. To know that I am surrounded by men and women who dwell in God, who have received the Holy Ghost, with whom I am to share the eternal righteousness and eternal rapture of the great life to come, this is blessedness. I breathe a Divine Air. I am in the New Jerusalem, which has come down out of Heaven from God, and the nations of the saved are walking its streets of Gold. I rejoice in the joy of Christ over those whom He has delivered from Eternal Death and lifted into the light and glory of God. The Kingdom of Heaven is there.'"

I admit the comparative infrequency of such experiences. Too often the church meeting comes far short of this high level, though not so often perhaps as may be supposed. Every Congregational church worthy of its name attains to it sometimes; and it does so when its main concern is not for numbers or any outward prosperity but for the Christian purity of its fellowship.

[1] Afterwards Bishop.

5. If I were required to say, "What is of faith"—permanent and unchanging—in Congregationalism, I think it has now been stated, viz. a Church is a visible society of those who commune together in the powers of a common life derived from Christ, who are spiritually equal by virtue of a direct personal relation to Him—servants and brethren one of another; and who are inspired by an *esprit de corps*, a moral enthusiasm, a spirit of discipline, which aims both instinctively and deliberately to reject what is alien, and assimilate what is akin, to the growth of a perfect Christian character.

This, it seems to me, is the substantial core of the Congregational (including the Baptist) witness.

As already said, its early advocates, though swift to see some of its implications, were slow to see others; nor did they draw a clear line between the essential and circumstantial. Much that was more or less adventitious continued to overlay and obscure the main things. Time only could teach the great lesson—a lesson not quite learnt even yet—I mean the lesson that "the life is more than the meat and the body than the raiment." In other words, that sacraments, ministry, modes of worship, organisation, confessions, or creeds are of no value except as means to an end. If they help to build up the Church's life *in* Christ and *for* Christ they are so far good; and by that test are to be constantly judged. Every Church will learn this lesson sooner or later.

I wish to illustrate in two or three instances how Congregationalists have learnt, or are learning, or have failed to learn it.

Thus (*a*) with regard to the Sacraments they have been consistent in holding that two only were instituted by Christ, and that these were meant to be of lasting obligation. They have, too, always been anxious to observe them in a spirit of reverent obedience to the mind of Christ. But their way of interpreting and using them has varied somewhat.[1] If we turn to Robert Browne we find that Baptism is viewed as the seal of a covenant, whereby, *on God's part*, the gift of His spirit, as an inward calling and furtherance of godliness, is promised; and whereby, *on our part*, we offer and give up ourselves, or our children, or others—being of tender age, if they be of our household and we have full power over them—to be of the Church and people of God.

[1] Concerning sacramental grace generally, the "Savoy Declaration" of 1658—the most classic statement of the older Congregationalism—speaks thus (cap. xxviii. § 3): "The grace which is exhibited in or by the Sacraments rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them, neither doth the efficacy of a Sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it, but upon the work of the Spirit and the word of institution which contains, together with a precept authorising the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers." Adopted by a Massachusetts Synod at Boston in 1680, and by a Connecticut Synod at Saybrook in 1708, the "Savoy Declaration" (as to its Confession of Faith) long continued to be a recognised standard for the Congregational churches of America. At a council representative of the whole body of the Congregational churches of the United States it was reaffirmed in 1865. Its vogue among the English churches was much less general. (See Dr. Willaston Walker's *Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, p. 353.)

Water is necessary, but the manner of applying it is indifferent—it may be by washing, or sprinkling, or dipping. The rite must be performed in a public or holy assembly. It must be accompanied by preaching of the word, and only a pastor can duly administer it. It must proceed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, unto the forgiveness of sins, and dying thereunto in one death and burial with Christ, and the preacher must pronounce the subjects to be baptized *into* the body and government of Christ, to be taught and to profess His laws. Then, finally, the Church must give thanks for "the party baptized," and pray for his further instruction and training unto salvation. Here it is noticeable that the name Pædo-Baptists would be unsuitable as descriptive of Congregational practice. This included not merely infants, or young people, but also all believing confessors. Moreover, in the case of infants the whole Church may be said to have stood sponsor—pledging itself to bring them up in the Lord. We find the same view taken in the "True Confession of Faith" put forth by "the people falsely called Brownists" in 1596—sixteen years later; and again in a document of 1603 exhibiting the points of difference between Congregationalists and the Church of England. To the like effect is the chapter on Baptism (xxix.) in the "Savoy Declaration" of 1658, which expressed the "Faith and order owned and practised in the Congregational Churches" of England at that time. It is surely

a worthy view; and, while attaching to Baptism no mechanical notion of grace, would ensure its being a spiritual means of grace to all concerned. It is a view also, in which I think so-called Baptists, with some surrender of detail, might reasonably agree. But in more recent days the Congregational attitude to Baptism has changed—not wholly for the better.

It is, indeed, to the good that *now* others besides the pastor may, on occasion, administer it—if they are Christian believers. This plainly is a legitimate deduction from the doctrine that office in the Church withdraws no right from the Church itself. It is also to the good that Baptism is not now confined to the children of believing parents—one or both. For that is a change due to escape from the Calvinistic conception of a limited covenant—a covenant for the elect only—to the conception of a grace, which is in covenant, or saving relation, to all mankind. It is a change which can do justice to the words "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven," and so claims every child for God.

It is, however, not to the good that Baptism too often is made to seem a mere act of formal dedication to God without any definite reminder of the Church's relation, or even God's relation, to the child. Too often neither the parent nor the child is taught to assume any responsibility, and the child is left in ignorance of the holy and blessed fellowship with himself and His people into which

God, through Christ, has called him. This is a comparatively poor view of Baptism, and entails a loss of grace upon both child and Church.

I think that a similar loss has followed our change of view with regard to the Lord's Supper. To the early Congregationalists it was far more a communion than a commemoration. They saw in it the crowning act of Redemption perpetually set forth by the living Lord in their midst. He was the Host, they were the guests gathered at His table. By faith they saw Him as really as the disciples in the upper room. They heard Him say over again the sweet and solemn words with which He gave the bread and wine. He renewed to them the experience of what by the bread and wine He meant to convey. They were one body in Him—all partaking of the same spiritual meat and the same spiritual drink.

In the words of the Savoy Declaration, "worthy receivers outwardly partaking of the visible elements of this Sacrament do then also inwardly, by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually receive and feed upon Christ crucified and all benefits of His death." Thus the Lord's Supper seals "their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto Him," and is "a bond and pledge of their communion with Him and with each other."[1] But in the course of the

[1] Cap. xxx. §§ 7, and i.

eighteenth century, partly as the result of an extreme reaction from everything supposed to be Romish, and partly as the result of a rationalism which destroyed all sense of the mystical in religion, the Congregational Churches forgot, to a great extent, their proper doctrine of the Real Presence. They lapsed into what is often styled, perhaps misstyled, sheer Zwinglianism. The Lord's Supper became merely a memento of the Past, and faith an effort to recall what once had been rather than a realisation of what eternally is. This impoverished attitude of mind persisted far into the nineteenth century, and has still many representatives. Reaction toward the older and truer view was set going under the influence of the Evangelical Revival, and has been strengthened in more recent times by stimulus from the Oxford movement.[1]

(*b*) Church polity is another matter in reference to which there has been a change. A. J. Scott, first Principal of Owens College, now Manchester University, in one of his "Discourses" spoke of two parties who "agree in representing the Church as bound to a certain system of government and instruction." One party he named the Traditionist, the other the Biblicist. The former "allow the precepts and examples of the Bible to be law, but not of that fullness and clearness that is needed

[1] Cf. Dale, "The Doctrine of the Real Presence," pp. 298–398 in *Essays and Addresses*.

for application to the daily wants of the Church." Hence the further need of a chart which shall interpret Biblical precepts and examples for our guidance in the present; and such a chart of Divine authority is to be found in the traditions of the Church. "Christ, who hath promised to be with her to the end of the world, *hath* been with her; and whatever she hath ordered under His presidency hath, for ever, all the force that He can give it." On the other hand, the Biblicist teaches that the whole "platform and regulation of the Church is laid down in Scripture; in the injunctions and examples of the Lord and His inspired ambassadors, and of that Primitive Church which was under their guidance. It is not enough that we do not vary from their theology, or from their spirit; or, rather, if we abide in these, we shall be sure to abide in the practice of their forms and methods also. And these are recorded in Scripture adequately for our present use. The ordinance that we find there is divine and good; the ordinance that we do not find there is merely human and bad." The early Congregationalists, in common with the Puritans generally, were strict Biblicists. For every detail of their Church polity supposed proof was drawn from some text or type of Scripture. They thought it blasphemous to suggest that Christ left, or could leave, His Church without a pattern as clear and complete as that which Moses received in the mount for the Tabernacle,

It was in a spirit of childlike (Hooker thought childish) obedience that they tried to reconstruct and realise this pattern. Of course they were wrong. Mr. Scott, in the "Discourse" just now quoted, defines the first principle of Church government as "the exercise of spiritual wisdom on the part of the Church in the selection of means fitted to promote the great end of her being," which is to make man one with God, and thereby also one with his fellow-man. "As in things natural so in the grand spiritual society also, the means are good because of their fitness to attain the end, and for no other reason."

In a sense this was Hooker's principle : for it was the purpose of his "Treatise" to show that the Church has freedom, in the light of reason and experience, to determine, from time to time, all questions relating to its own organisation. But his Church resolved itself into the rulers of the Church, and the Church's freedom into a right of appeal to the authority of the first four or five centuries. As a matter of fact, the principle is implicit in Congregationalism in its finest form. For, if the life of Christ, expressed in a communion of saints, makes the essence of a Church, then it must be that "the Church of every age is perfectly free to make the organisation the closest expression of its highest life, and the most effective means for securing the purpose for which an organised Church exists." But this means that the life resident in

the Church as a whole creates the form. "The polity must come from within; it must not be imposed from without; it may recognise external circumstances, but must not be controlled by them." It is an organic growth. "The polity of the Church must be created by the idea of the Church."

Congregationalists have often been but imperfectly conscious alike of their liberty and its limitations in this respect. Sometimes their mistake has been to sacrifice the healthy development of life to an unintelligent conservatism; sometimes their mistake has been the reverse, viz. to risk vital interests by indulging an irresponsible spirit of adventure, and welcoming what is novel in Church practice for the sake of some secondary gain.

But, on the whole, their perception of the true law of progress has become increasingly clear.

They have learnt to see more and more that the Church is free to abandon the old or accept the new just so far as old or new tends to conserve and cherish its best life. Dr. Mackennal was of opinion that Congregationalism and Presbyterianism are not incompatible, and that Episcopacy, that is, the constitutional authority, for certain purposes, of the specially gifted and experienced man, might coexist with Congregational autonomy and representative government of the united churches for common ends.

Perhaps so; but, if so, the movement in that direction cannot be forced from without—it must

come as a demand and necessity of that spiritual life which all churches really feel to be supreme.[1]

(*c*) It is jealousy for the free play of that life and a faith in its divine capabilities which explain the Congregational relation to the State and to creeds.

That relation has not been uniform. We have seen that Robert Browne had no objection to the interference of the Prince, nor had Henry Barrow or John Robinson, nor had Congregationalists of the second generation like Henry Jacob. But the interference they allowed was within certain definite limits.

He could not gather or establish a Church, for Church members are of the willing sort. Once gathered, however, the Prince, having previously made himself acquainted with the truth about the Church and joined its membership, should stand ready to supervise the Church and see that it actually conformed to the doctrine of Christ. He should also suppress opposing errors and practices.

Dr. Dale is quite right when he describes the early

[1] Experiments towards (at least) a Presbyterianising of Congregationalism have been more frequent and systematic in New England than here. Compare, for instance, the "Proposals of 1705, and the Saybrook Platform of 1708" (chap. xv. of Dr. Willaston Walker's *Creeds and Platforms*). The history and circumstances of the New England churches gave occasion, and might seem to promise success, to such experiments. But even so they were defeated by the superior force of the Congregational principle. In Massachusetts "the Proposals were never prosecuted beyond mere proposals," because "there were some very considerable persons among the ministers, as well as of the Brethren, who thought the liberties of particular churches to be in danger of being too much limited and infringed in them." In Connecticut they fared better, but mainly through being artificially sustained by the civil authority.

Congregational struggle as a struggle for the rights of Christ. "When 'by one blast of Queen Elizabeth's trumpet' all Englishmen were made members of the national Church, and were required, under penalty, to attend its services, the complaint of the Congregationalists was not that the Queen had trampled on the personal rights and violated the freedom of the English people, but that she had usurped the authority of Christ. 'No prince can make any a member of the Church.'"[1] But Dr. Dale does not seem to see that this contention for the authority of Christ went hand in hand, for these men, with the contention that if the State did its duty it would do more than passively respect the rights of Christ—it would actively enforce them.

This is why the early Independents could condemn persecution of themselves and at the same time tolerate, or even approve, persecution of others.

They were ensnared by the usual sophism that, since their doctrine was the truth, it was just for them to be encouraged and for its adversaries to be put down.

From this standpoint the church-state which the Congregationalists of New England set up (in Massachusetts and Connecticut), and zealously guarded against intrusive heresy, was not inconsistent.[2]

[1] *Essays and Addresses*, p. 217.

[2] It is necessary, however, to distinguish between the "Pilgrim Fathers" of New Plymouth and the "Puritans" of the Bay. The latter adopted Congregationalism from the former, but not their

It was Brownism or Barrowism full blown. It actualised what might have come to pass in England if events had not been so ordered as to keep the Independent well under the Cross until he had grasped the scope of his own principles. For the most part he had done this by the time Cromwell held the reins, and by none more fully than by Cromwell himself. But it was still the opinion of Congregationalists in 1658, when they issued the Savoy Confession of Faith, that the "magistrate is bound to encourage, promote, and protect the professor and profession of the Gospel, and to manage and order civil administrations in a due subserviency to the interests of Christ in the world"—though this did not exclude equal treatment of various Church polities. It has often been said that the great difference between the Independents and the Presbyterians was that the latter desired a State establishment of the Church and the former did not. I confess that I do not so read the case. I think the Independents down to a comparatively late period would have rejoiced if the State had decreed that Independency expressed the truth and that none but Independent churches should be established.

As it was, it is historic fact that, even into the eighteenth century, they allowed the right (if not the duty) of the State to favour the Church which it

liberalism. So far as I am aware no charge of "persecution" can be proved against the "Pilgrims." Political no less than religious tolerance was rooted in their faith—that there is no finality in doctrine. (See Mackennal, *The Evolution of Congregationalism*, p. 80.)

believed to be the true Church; and did not get beyond the view that it ought, nevertheless, to protect Dissenters from molestation and civil injustice.

But the Congregational plea in relation to the State is properly this:—

The State is ordained of God; its functions are of vast and sacred importance; it ought to be animated by a conscience of religion and a high moral ideal; and it is the task of the Church to create and develop that conscience.

But the Church herself is the home of a life of which Christ is the immanent source and stay, guide, and Lord.

She is dependent on Him and accountable to Him from first to last.

To hear His voice in her heart, to understand and observe His behests, is her holiest concern. For the State, therefore, to interfere in what she says and does is as much out of place as if the State were to undertake to regulate the motions of a poet's genius.

Except in respect of indirect influences, she lies outside its province altogether.

For a like reason, if in a less degree, she must repudiate the interference of any external authority —of Presbytery or Synod or Council—save so far as these may declare what commends itself to the corporate judgment of each responsible Church unit or congregation.

She is in each of these a law to herself because immediately under law to Christ.

(*d*) It is from the same high ground that the Congregationalist deprecates the imposition of creeds.

Creeds are a natural expression of faith. They are faith's articulate utterance. And there are fundamentals of the Christian creed which a Congregational Church could not disown without disowning itself. It stakes its existence upon belief in a risen, exalted, unchanging Christ—the Revealer of the Father, the Redeemer of man, the Mediator of truth and grace through a living Spirit. These are facts of the universal Christian consciousness which are the soul of its soul. Nor has the Congregationalist ever hesitated to confess this—his fundamental faith—together with such inferences from it as the measure of his insight might warrant.

Congregational confessions began with the first Congregational Churches. Browne's church at Norwich and Middelburg had one; the Barrowist church of London and Amsterdam had more than one. Dr. Willaston Walker, of Hartford Theological seminary, has compiled and edited what he calls *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, in a large volume which shows how in England and New England the Congregational Churches have been almost too anxious to announce and assert their orthodoxy.

But in theory the Creed has always been the voluntary confession of a faith answering to present conviction, and not something to be imposed from outside as final, or imposed at all. John Robin-

son's parting advice to his flock at Delft Haven (July 22, 1620), when he "charged them before God and His blessed Angels to follow him no further than he followed Christ . . . for he was very confident the Lord had yet more truth and light to break forth out of His holy Word," has been a cherished watchword. Many a time has it been forgotten; and many a Congregational Church has forged its creed into a chain. But it remains true that Congregationalism is weighted and held back by no authoritative creed. Why? Certainly not because it stands by a mere right of private judgment. "Those who speak of rights that men have to entertain what opinions they like use one of the strangest expressions that ever came from human lips—as if opinion were to be mere matter of liking in any sense. We are not to believe anything because we like; we are to believe because we are bound to believe, because we are bound to seek to know the truth, discerning what commends itself as the truth. It would scarcely be unsafe to say that this is the only thing over which a man has no right at all, but which has an absolute and infinite right over him; for all things to which he ought to submit are included in its claim upon him." [1]

Accordingly, it is not the right of private judgment, but the august nature of truth; and, even more, the assurance of its being within our own reach,

[1] A. J. Scott, *Discourses*, p. 274.

open to our own reason and concience, which forbids the imposition of creeds. Christ in the midst means a spirit of Truth in the midst; and is an imperative call, as well as a gracious permission, to follow its guidance. We may make too much of the teaching function of the Church, and too little of its learning function. Christ's promise of inward guidance extends to all truth, all the truth bound up in Himself, and dare we say that the truth of any creed, or all the creeds, is all the truth bound up in Christ? The Spirit whose working in the life of the first disciples brought forth the original preaching of the Gospel and the great writings that enshrine it; the Spirit whose working in other times has again and again brought to remembrance forgotten or neglected truths that were Christ's own, and reinstated them in power; the Spirit whose working has evinced the harmony there ever is between the mind of Christ and whatever truth the mind of man may reach in any sphere—this Spirit is the abiding possession of the Church. "He has not left the Christian people, but is still leading them toward the full truth and the perfect character in fellowship with God. He is the present Guide of the Christian experience and the Christian thought. His leading has never imparted infallibility to men, for an obvious reason: men could not receive it sufficiently to become infallible. He did not render early Councils infallible, nor does He free individuals or Churches from all error now; and

yet both then and now His leading is real and divine. It is the privilege of Christians to recognise His guidance as a present fact, and to trust it as the hope of the Church; a privilege often overlooked and never fully utilised, but very precious."[1]

This is indeed the best gift of God to His Church. It is the gift of the New Covenant of which Jeremiah dreamed. And it is a part of its preciousness that it is not limited to any official section of the Church or to any official channel. It bestows an inner light upon those who are pure in heart—whatever be their social rank or stage of culture—an inner light enabling them to discern the truth which is, or is not, embodied in a creed. Its home may be quite as much with the intellectual babes whom the wise and prudent of John Robinson's day nicknamed Symon the Sadler, Tomkin the Taylor, Billy the Bellows-mender, as with the wise and prudent themselves. It secures continuity of faith by creating the experience out of which faith grows; and by nourishing the experience enlarges the compass of faith. Creeds, therefore, are only good, at the best, as records of what has been attained; they are not the measure of attainment. No form of sound words can fully express the spiritual facts once for all delivered to faith; and no Church that believes in the living Spirit will either deny the facts, or deny that their significance is inexhaustible. This is a truth

[1] W. N. Clarke, *An Outline of Theology*, p. 385.

which the Quakers reasserted when it was deeply overlaid by Protestant traditionalism; and this I take to be also the true Congregational position—a fact confirmed by the long story of the Congregational Churches which, speaking generally, have been distinguished by the twofold feature of loyalty both to Catholic Evangelic faith, and to new light.

(*e*) All their gravest failures are traceable to the same cause, viz. a practical denial of Christ's presence in the midst. Where that is ignored, the contrast between the actual and the ideal may become ghastly. "It is corruption of the best that is the worst." There is nothing more offensive to honest men than a combination of lofty professions with low conduct. And a Congregational Church which, by its definition, is the creation and organ of the Holy Spirit, quickly degenerates into an object of deserved contempt if another spirit takes possession. It has a name to live and is dead, or worse. Some of us recall Mark Rutherford's description, in his Autobiography, of the Congregational church of which for a time he was pastor; and we are aware that it was not an uncommon instance at the period referred to. Its characteristic was pretence—pretence of faith, pretence of worship, pretence of goodness, pretence of zeal. This was a Church which came after the Evangelical revival, and was one of those in which the glowing fire of that great movement had burnt itself out. But the point to be noted is this: that

even dead Congregational Churches are still haunted by the ghost of their essential idea, Christ in the midst. So it was that when Christ came back in the power of His spirit through the preaching of Whitefield and Wesley the Independent Churches were among the first to recognise the fact and give Him welcome. Then, all over the land they awoke as from a deep sleep. Chapels were filled which had been almost deserted. New chapels were built; the first Sunday Schools sprang up among them. Church members met on the old basis of a common life in Christ, and realised afresh the old fellowship. A new spirit of concern for the conversion of the unbelieving in their own neighbourhood, which ere long led to the formation of Home Missionary Societies and County Unions, developed yet further into a concern for winning the heathen world for Christ. During the greater part of the eighteenth century the missionary impulse was hardly felt, either among Congregationalists or among English Christians generally. And there could be no surer sign than this that the true life of a Congregational Church had ebbed away. For where Christ is realised in the midst His voice *must* be repeating the charge, "Go ye into all the world and make disciples of every creature." Once a Saviour He is ever a Saviour, and His passion for souls cannot but burn in all with whom He dwells. In the seventeenth century, for example, John Eliot, the Congregational pastor of Rothbury, New Eng-

land, heard His voice as Paul and Barnabas heard it in the Church at Antioch, and through years of devoted work for the Indians obeyed it as they did. If at first he was almost alone in his task it was because in New England, as in the Homeland, the Churches were too much absorbed by other interests. Yet it was Cromwell, the Independent, who, prompted by sympathy with so noble a pioneer, did most to further and encourage the missionary enterprise of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England; and Independent ministers were his warmest supporters. In like manner, when their life in Christ returned in flood in the eighteenth century, one of its sure results was to make the Congregational Churches—both Baptist and Pædo-Baptist—fervently missionary. In 1792 the "Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen" was founded at Kettering; while in 1796 the London Missionary Society began its great career on interdenominational lines — but initiated by Dr. Bogue, the Congregational minister at Gosport, and soon sustained entirely by the Congregational Churches.[1]

[1] "Congregationalists started the first Foreign Missionary Society that was organised and incorporated in the United States. . . . Other Foreign Missionary Societies have grown out of this; and our brethren of the Baptist, Presbyterian, and Dutch Reformed Churches on our side of the water have occasion to rejoice that God put into the hearts of three young men at Williams College, in Williamstown, Massachusetts, to gather at a haystack and devote themselves to missionary work in foreign lands."—Dr. Noble, Address at the International Congregational Council (Edinburgh, 1908) on *Historic Congregationalism in the United States*, p. 282.

6. It has often been said that the Congregational Church may cultivate a keen sense of brotherhood within itself, but tends to isolation even from other Churches of its own order; and still more from the world at large. Many cases can be quoted in specious support of such a statement. But it is not really true. It will be found on inquiry that the isolation sprang from general causes or special circumstances. Thus, during the dreary period of repression which followed the Restoration, the scattered groups of Congregationalists could not do otherwise than struggle each for its own existence. If they were little gardens walled around, the walls were not of their own building. The law gave them no option. It cut them off from every outlet to a larger social life, and threw them back upon themselves. Moreover, this centripetal tendency was not confined to Congregationalists. All through the eighteenth century and through some decades of the nineteenth, the regnant habits of thought were individualistic and affected all the Churches. It was natural that Congregational churches should be affected more deeply than others: for independency was one of their notes, and the temptation to emphasise it unduly always lay in wait. But it is true to say, nevertheless, that, of itself and in exact proportion to the strength of its proper life, the inherent tendency of a Congregational church is toward unselfish, social service. One proof of this is the outburst of missionary zeal to which I

have adverted, and its continuously steady growth.[1] Another is the eagerness with which Congregationalists took up the responsibilities of citizenship in municipal and political life as soon as the State unbarred their way. A third proof may be seen in the calm and considered efforts of Congregational statesmen, supported on all hands by the rank and file, to bring about a voluntary union of local churches on a national—yea, even an international scale; and also to provide for the permanent release of their ministers from the anxieties of poverty by the aid of a central fund.[2] But, to my mind, the best proof is the fact that they are keen to co-operate with all sections of the Church for the universal ends of the Kingdom of God. They do not propose, or expect, that other sections of the Church will surrender what marks each off from the rest. They can see, in the light of experience, that abolition of differences is not possible, and that uniformity is not desirable. Each section of the Church has had its own work to do and has met some need of the Christian consciousness more

[1] This includes those "Home Missionary" agencies which have now become so characteristic of our churches—see, for example, what is said by Dr. Noble (*ibid.* p. 282) about the City Missionary Society of Chicago; and compare what is said about the work of the "Manchester and District Congregational Board" in "a series of sketches" entitled *Cloud-Rifts over Cottonopolis* (1911).

[2] See Dr. Willaston Walker's paper on "The Relation of Congregationalism to National and Œcumenical Minds" (*Report of 1908 International Congregational Council*, pp. 293 ff.) for a powerful statement of, and appeal to, the "universal note" in Congregationalism.

or less vital. But their belief that questions of polity proper, and many questions of doctrine, are of quite secondary importance, leaves them free to work untrammelled with Christians of every name who will accept them as allies in the fight against sin; and, of late years, the longing to use their freedom in this respect has become a widespread passion. I venture to say that there is no part of the Church—Evangelical or Catholic—with which Congregationalists would decline to stand shoulder to shoulder in any endeavour to advance the knowledge and power of the Gospel of Christ.

Such an attitude is not one of compromise. It is an attitude of consistency. It issues from the logic of their idea of the Church. And they are no less consistent when they deeply deplore the *non possumus* attitude which exclaims—the possession of a common Christian life and ideals is not enough; we cannot unite on these alone; specific differences forbid; you must accept this or that as a preliminary. They think such an attitude is schismatic. For it contradicts the unity of the spirit. It renders division a necessity and consecrates it as a duty.

7. Congregationalists have given much and received much in the course of the years. As I said at the outset, their distinctive vocation has been to rehabilitate the true idea of the Church; and it is not an exaggeration to affirm that their idea of the Church is now well-nigh undisputed. To quote

Dr. Mackennal: "The Congregational doctrine of Church membership—that it implies personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, purity of life, a general harmony of religious sentiment between each member and the Church as a whole—has leavened the nation." [1]

If a tree is known by its own fruit, by this test Congregationalism can bear to be judged.

It has shown that the Christian consciousness dwelling in a Christian people can preserve continuity of faith and life amid the most varied changes of environment, and has no need to depend for guidance upon Prince or Priesthood.

It has shown how insistence upon Christian life as the main thing in a Church can melt the hardness of dogma and transmute its dead letter into a living spirit of personal and domestic virtue—as might be illustrated by many a beautiful instance drawn from the quiet annals of many an unregarded Congregational 'Bethel.'

It has shown that the sense of personal responsibility in religion inspires a sense of responsibility generally, and is creative of strong men—men of a strong and aspiring type.

It has shown, chiefly by the great example of the American Commonwealth, that a Church of the spiritually free will establish a State of the politically

[1] *Evolution of Congregationalism*, p. 230; cf. Bampton Lecture for 1909, *The Church and the World*, by Walter Hobhouse, pp. 25 ff., characteristics of the Church in the New Testament; also pp. 273, 277, 279, 282, 302, 310.

free, if it gets the chance;[1] and that those who habitually exercise liberty of conscience themselves will, sooner or later, grant it unreservedly as the right of every man.

It has, in these and other ways, played its appointed part in the unfolding of the manifold grace of God. The British Isles and America—may we not add the whole English-speaking world?—would have been different and the worse but for its influence. Its witness for simplicity and purity and reality in religion has not been in vain. It has helped to bring Christ home to men as their Lord in the so-called secular no less than in the sacred spheres of life. It has been, in fact, at the heart of that English and American Puritanism which, with all its defects,

[1] An eminent Swiss jurist, M. Borgeaud, traces the history of modern Democracy to the compact signed in the cabin of the *Mayflower*; cp. the address on "Congregationalism in New England and the United States of America," by F. M. Fullerton, in *Report of International Congregational Council* (1891), p. 129. In this address it is shown how Congregationalism in America was also the "fount of education" (p. 130),—a fact illustrated by Dr. Noble in the address already quoted (pp. 278, 279). In the "Reforming Synod" of 1679, held at Boston, one of the answers (No. XI.) to the second question (What is to be done that so these evils be reformed?) is "that effectual care should be taken, respecting schools of Learning. The interests of Religion and good Literature have been wont to rise and fall together. . . . Ecclesiastical Story informs that great care was taken by the Apostles and their immediate Successors, for the setling of schools in all places where the Gospel had been preached. . . . When New England was poor, and we were but few in number comparatively, there was a spirit to encourage Learning, and the Colledge (Harvard) was full of students whom God hath made blessings, not only in this, but in other lands . . ." (*Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism*, p. 437).

has done so much to put a moral conscience even into art and commerce and politics.

On the other hand, Congregationalists have gained much as well as given. Not least have they gained from adversity. If their way had been easier they would not have learnt so well the truth and power of their essential principle. Persecution has been, and might be again, a blessing to them. The light upon their path has never been more clear or more evidently Divine than when the surrounding darkness was most dense.

But they have gained also from that openness of mind which comes through prosperity or at least through kindlier circumstances. They have learnt *how* to learn from other Churches. Their increased regard for what is historically venerable and beautiful in the externals of religion they owe largely to the Established Church. Presbyterianism has impressed upon them the value of order and intellectual thoroughness and co-ordinated action. Methodism more than once has restored their soul, kindled afresh their sense of a living spirit, brought them back to faith in the inner witness of experience. From all Churches more or less, and from all quarters, their treasure of knowledge and life has been enriched. But their pearl of great price, apart from which they are nothing, and for the sake of which they should be prepared to sell everything, is still the same, viz. their idea of the Church as consisting of really Christian

people, a communion of saints, conscious of Christ in the midst, and looking away to Him with unveiled face always and for all things.

The characteristic features of moderate seventeenth-century Congregationalism meet, and are well expressed, in the tract entitled "An Apologetical Narration, Humbly submitted to the Honourable Houses of Parliament—by (the five 'Dissenting Brethren' of the Westminster Assembly) Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Sidrach Simpson, Jeremiah Burroughes, William Bridge—1643."

(1) *Its breadth.*—"We have this sincere profession to make before God and all the world," that all our "conscience of the defilements we conceived to cleave to the true worship of God in" the English Churches, "or of the unwarranted power in church-governors exercised therein did never work in any of us any other thought, much less opinion, but that multitudes of the assemblies and parochial congregations thereof were the true Churches and Body of Christ; and the ministry thereof a true ministry, much less did it ever enter into our hearts to judge them Anti-Christian." "We always have professed . . . and when ourselves had least, yea, no hopes of even so much as visiting our own land in peace and safety to our persons, that we both did and would hold a communion with them as the Churches of God."

(2) *Its Biblicism.*—Their first and supreme rule was "the fullness of the Scriptures," *i.e.* that "there is therein a complete sufficiency, as to make the man of God perfect, so also to make the Churches of God perfect . . . not daring to make out what was defective in our light, in matters Divine, with human prudence—the fatal error to Reformation—lest by sewing any piece of the 'old garment' unto the 'new' we should make the rent worse."

(3) *Its open-mindedness.*—"We had too great an instance of our own frailty in the former way of our conformity; and, therefore, in a jealousie of ourselves we kept this reserve . . . to alter and retract (though not lightly) whatever should be discovered to be taken up out of a misunderstanding of this 'rule': which principle we wish were—next to that most supreme,

viz. to be in all things guided by the perfect will of God—enacted as the most sacred law of all other, in the midst of all other laws and canons ecclesiastical in Christian states and churches throughout the world."

(4) *Its conduct of public worship.* — An ordinary service consisted of "public and solemn prayers for kings and all in authority, etc.; the reading of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments; exposition of them, as occasion was, and constant preaching of the Word; the administration of the two Sacraments—baptism of infants and the Lord's Supper; singing of psalms; collections for the poor, etc., every Lord's Day."

(5) *Its officers*, viz. "pastors, teachers, ruling elders—with us not lay, but ecclesiastic persons separated to that service—and deacons"; in fact, "no other but the very same which the Reformed Churches judge necessary and sufficient, and as instituted by Christ and His Apostles for the perpetual government of His Church."

(6) *Its rule of discipline.*—This, too, "for the matter" is not "any other but what all acknowledge, viz. admonition and excommunication upon obstinacy and impenitency." But, for the manner, it is to be "exercised" in the "several congregations by their own elders." "Yet not claiming to ourselves an 'independent power' in every congregation to give account, or be subject, to none others; but only a full and entire power, complete within ourselves, until we shall be challenged to err grossly."

(7) *Its qualified dependence on* (*a*) "*Other neighbour churches.*" —In all cases of grave offence or difference—"by obligation of the common law of 'communion of Churches' and for the vindication of the glory of Christ, which in common they hold forth—the Church or Churches challenged to offend, or differ, are to submit themselves to" open trial and examination by neighbouring Churches of the same order; and, refusing so to submit or to repent, may be deprived by the latter of "all Christian communion with them." (*b*) *The magistrate*—to whom is ascribed a power of general oversight, and, in such cases as those just mentioned, an "interposing power" if it "do but assist and back the sentence of other Churches denouncing this non-communion against Churches miscarrying." And so, "that a single and particular society of men, professing the name

of Christ, and pretending to be endowed with a power from Christ to judge them that are of the same body and society within themselves, should further arrogate unto themselves an exemption from giving account to, or being censurable by any other, either Christian magistrates above them, or neighbour Churches about them" is a "maxim" to be "abhorred." Hence the "apologists" resented "that proud and insolent title of Independency" which had been "affixed" to them as well as "the odious name of Brownism." "We believe," say they, "the truth to lie and consist in a *middle way* betwixt that which is falsely charged on us, 'Brownism,' and that which is the contention of these times, the 'authoritative Presbyterial government' in all the subordinations and proceedings of it."

THE BAPTIST CHURCHES

BY

NEWTON H. MARSHALL

I. Origins.

The mistaken ideal of Homogeneous Uniformity in the Church. A Living Church tends to Self-Differentiation. The awakening produced in England by the Translation of the Bible. Resultant movements in the Church: 1. The Reformation; 2. Puritanism; 3. Separatism; 4. Presbyterianism; 5. Independency; 6. the Baptist Movement. The Baptist claim to Churchmanship.

II. The Distinctive Feature of the Baptist Movement: the Centrality of Conversion.

Baptists and Anabaptists distinguished. John Smyth. The first English Baptist Church. General and particular Baptists. The centrality of conversion in both groups. Baptists and preaching.

III. Two Chief Contributions made by Baptists to the Life of the Church.

1. The doctrines of religious liberty first enunciated by Baptists. Leonard Busher's *Plea*. John Smyth's *Long Confession*. Peter Chamberlen. Results of this doctrine: love for civil liberty increased; home legislation, American constitution, and French Revolution affected. Baptists under persecution.
2. The Foreign Missionary enterprise. Baptists in the eighteenth century. The Wesleyan Revival. William Carey. The Baptist part in this movement not accidental, but involved in their principle of the centrality of conversion. Far-reaching effect of the movement.

IV. Modern Modifications of the Baptist Movement.

1. Fusion of particular and general Baptist bodies; 2. Open fellowship; 3. Consolidation of organisation and world-wide extension: the Baptist World Alliance. The doctrine of the centrality of conversion enhanced by all these.

V. The Place of the Baptists in the Catholic Church.

THE BAPTIST CHURCHES

When the Act of Uniformity was passed in 1559, legislative expression was given to an ideal which has always greatly attracted Churchmen—the ideal of the homogeneous Church; that is, the ideal of the Church, with one order of ritual, one form of government, one hierarchic order, and one type of doctrine. This ideal has very generally been identified with the ideal of Christian Unity. It has been supposed that apart from homogeneity there could be no real unity in the Church. Many Churchmen then rejoiced in the Act of Uniformity, because they saw in it a real step towards Christian unity, and many Churchmen to-day, although they have quite given up any expectation of achieving Christian unity by legislation, conceive Christian unity as coming through the voluntary adoption of some such homogeneity as the Act of Uniformity sought to enforce.

In recent years, however, many things have co-operated to teach us to give to the homogeneous a less exalted place. Biology, chemistry, physics, psychology, political science—indeed, all the sciences—associate the homogeneous with the primitive

and immature, or even with the degenerate, and insist that healthy, adult, and highly developed organisms tend always more and more towards variety and differentiation. Growth is from the homogeneous towards the complex. At the same time we have learnt to give a new connotation to our notion of unity. Unity we see to be in no way opposed to differentiation. On the contrary, the truest and most permanent unity is to be found in the complex rather than in the simple. The highest unity we know is the unity of personality in will—and that is also the highest and subtlest complex.

These considerations are not without bearing upon the history of the Church in England. In pre-Reformation times the Church in England may fairly be styled homogeneous. The upgrowth of Lollardry, that bid fair at one time to give rise to a notable development, was unable to withstand the terrible persecutions of the fourteenth century, followed, as they were, by the Wars of the Roses, and in the early years of Henry VIII.'s reign there obtained in the main just that ecclesiastical homogeneity which Elizabeth afterwards sought to restore in vain. With the Reformation, however, new life entered the Church in England, and this life, full and mighty, resulted in rapid and startling changes. I shall briefly enumerate those changes directly. For the moment may I invite you to notice that they were changes inside the Church.

They were developments of the Church itself in England.

The chief if not the sole occasion of this great awakening of life within the Church was the translation of the Scriptures into the English tongue. Prior to that translation, not only the laity, but also the bulk of the clergy, were completely ignorant of the Bible, unless anywhere a tradition of Lollardry lingered in secret. But after Tyndale, Coverdale, and Henry VIII.'s bishops had done their work, the Bible became the venerated possession of the whole nation. The result of this new discovery of the Bible was the self-criticism of the Church in the light of the apostolic teaching and the example of Jesus. It was obvious to every sincere thinking reader of the Bible that the Church was very different from what it had been in the days of Paul. Canterbury and York were strangely diverse from Antioch and Corinth.

This self-criticism did not proceed very swiftly, nor could it possibly be carried into institutional change by any one mind or group of men. It was progressive, carried on by a series of stages, each onward movement being initiated by a smaller group of Churchmen, the more cautious, or tenacious of the past, being left behind, as the process was carried, stage by stage, toward completion.

The first of this series of movements was a great one, in which a large body, though perhaps a minority, of Churchmen took part. It consisted

in that criticism and revision of doctrine (the political separation from the Papacy having now been effected) which we call the Reformation. The second movement arose amongst the Reformers themselves, and consisted in a criticism of the ritual of the Church and a desire to revise that. This was the Puritan movement, strictly so-called. The third movement, originating within the Puritan body (if one may use such a phrase of a widely scattered group of people without strict organisation) criticised the inclusive nature of the Church. It saw that in the Church the godly and ungodly worshipped and communicated on equal terms. There was no distinction between the world and the Church any more. This distinction this section of the Puritans wished to set up again, and their movement is called the Separatist movement. As such, however, the Separatists did not criticise the government of the Church. That was left to the Presbyterians, who, under Cartwright, sought to destroy that episcopacy which they failed to find in the New Testament, by the establishment within the Church of England itself of a system of Church government, in which presbytery and synod would take the place of bishops. This system they actually succeeded to some extent in setting up, especially in East Anglia, and, but for Whitgift and his ecclesiastical commission, they might have completely succeeded in their object.

So far the self-criticism of the Church had pro-

ceeded by these stages—Reformation of doctrine, Puritanism in ritual, Separate congregations, and Presbytery in place of Prelacy. The next stage was more radical. It consisted in a criticism of the fundamental idea of the Church, and found its first practical expression in the foundation of the first Independent or Congregational Church on English soil by Robert Browne. The Congregational movement summed up in itself all the movements that had gone before. Its doctrine was the reformed, in ritual it was Puritan, it fixed once and for all in a visible institution the Separatist ideal, and it denied the episcopacy with the Presbyterians. And all this it gathered up in the one bold doctrine of equating the visible Church with any separate company of believers, which it regarded as by nature and right self-governing under the authority of Christ.

Still, however, this movement within the Church, this self-differentiation of the Church, rendered quick and fruitful by the study of the Word of God, this keen and ruthless process of self-criticism and revision, was not at an end. The constitution of the Church in conformity with its fundamental idea having come under scrutiny and reformation, a new element was brought into the focus of the Christian consciousness and conscience, viz. the mode of entry into the Church. This mode so far had been accepted from tradition without criticism. The Reformers took it over from Rome, the

Puritans accepted it with Canterbury, the Separatists had no quarrel with it, the Presbyterians believed in it, nor did the Independents feel it to be at all incongruous with their position. It was the mode of baptism. Baptism was the way into the Church. True, all these Churchmen belonged to one or other of two parties in respect of baptism. The Reformers, the Puritans, and the Presbyterians agreed that all baptized persons were, unless excommunicate, part of the Church, whereas the Separatists and Independents believed that the Church was composed of baptized persons who voluntarily united in the Church, desiring to separate themselves from the world. The Separatists and Independents, therefore, had indirectly and unwittingly, so to speak, criticised baptism as the way into the Church. This indirect and confused criticism received final and drastic expression in the next movement of our series. This was the Baptist movement which, adopting the Congregational position with all that this brought with it as the spoils of the previous stages of development due to Bible study within the Church, made baptism the real entry to the Church of a voluntarily separated congregation, by raising the age of baptism to some point of time subsequent to the subject's personal experience of a saving belief.

I have felt it necessary summarily to review the whole movement since the Reformation inside the Church, in order to show the place of the Bap-

tist churches in that whole movement, and in order to indicate the point of view which Baptists adopt in claiming to have a real place by nature and right within the one Church of Christ in England. Baptists claim to be Churchmen with the rest.

The actual historic circumstances under which the first Baptist churches arose need now to be briefly sketched, especially as some little confusion exists under this head.

For a long time the English Baptists were known as Anabaptists. It was natural that this name should be given to them, and yet it is quite misleading to suppose that it is justly theirs. This they well knew, for they continually protested against its application to themselves. For the Baptists and Anabaptists are in reality distinct from one another both in origin and doctrine. That they are distinct in origin we see at once when we observe that neither of the two Baptist bodies which for nearly two hundred and fifty years existed side by side in this country, is to be traced back to any Anabaptist bodies. There were Anabaptist groups, mostly composed of foreign refugees, in England from early in the sixteenth century, but none of these is parent of any one of those early Baptist churches to which our present Baptist denomination traces its origin. These Anabaptist communities had no direct or great effect upon English Church life. The thin Anabaptist stream passing to this country from the Continent, died

away in soil alien to its origin and to its real and characteristic ideals and function. The Baptist churches sprang, not from Anabaptist communities, but from the very heart of that living Church movement which we have been so far tracing. John Smyth, the founder of the first General Baptist Church, entered Cambridge University about 1586, proceeded to his M.A., after a normal course at Christ's College, in 1593, and was ordained in 1594 by Wickham, Bishop of Lincoln. In 1600 he was appointed lecturer of the City of Lincoln, but was inhibited by the bishop of the diocese in 1602 on grounds of which we have no definite knowledge. Shortly after this he went to live at Gainsborough, where the Separatist movement was strong. Here Smyth himself became a Separatist, and by and by was chosen as pastor of the Independent Church in Gainsborough. When this Church was driven from England by persecution, John Smyth went with the rest—Helwys, and Morton, and Robinson being of the company—to Amsterdam, where what is known as the Ancient Church had its home. We need not linger over the difficulties, disputes, and differences which fermented in this little community of exiles and pioneers. We know that in 1608 Smyth and some eighty others hived off from the Ancient Church, and that in 1609 he finally became a Baptist. This means that he came to the conclusion that no baptism was valid of which the subject was not a believer. Smyth was not an im-

mersionist. All that he contended for in his first Baptist publication was that "infants ought not to be baptized, because (1) there is neither precept nor example in the New Testament of any infants that were baptized by John or Christ's disciples, and (2) Christ commanded to make disciples by teaching them and then to baptize them." So far was Smyth from regarding himself as an Anabaptist or even a Mennonite, that he, because he could find none to baptize him, though he was well acquainted with Mennonites of standing, baptized himself and then his companions. So we see the whole process of the criticism and reform of the Church which went on in this period summed up in the life of one man, who passed from the Reformed Church to the Baptist position by definite stages. In 1611 or 1612 Thomas Helwys, with Morton, Busher, and others, left Amsterdam and returned to England and formed the first General Baptist Church on English soil. They worshipped together near Newgate Street, London.

Similarly it may be shown that the Particular Baptists, whose origin is quite distinct from that of the General Baptists, sprang, not from the Anabaptists, but from the great native movement within the Church in England. In 1616 there was in Southwark a church founded by Separatists, of which Henry Jacob was the pastor. It was to this church that the name Independent was first given. In 1633 a number of members who held

peculiar views on baptism were dismissed in a perfectly friendly way from this mother church to form a church of their own, and, in 1638, the church thus formed rejected infant baptism and became the First Particular or Calvinistic Baptist Church in England, with Spilsbury probably as its pastor. This church also at first still practised baptism by sprinkling or affusion, and not by immersion.

So we see that neither of the Baptist denominations, which were fused in 1885 in the present Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, is by origin Anabaptist. Nor were these bodies Anabaptist in doctrine. There were three distinctive marks of the Anabaptist movement. First, it had an extreme social doctrine, which rejected civil authority and all traditional social order. It was from its inception involved in the struggles of the peasants of Germany and Switzerland against their feudal lords. Anabaptism was the religious analogue of the "Revolt of the Common Man." Next, the Anabaptist theology was also extreme. It did not flow in the channels of the great streams of reformation, either Lutheran or Calvinistic, but was marked by a great variety of theological peculiarities, often as mutually contradictory as they were unorthodox. One doctrine, however, seems to have been peculiar to the Anabaptists wherever they were found—it was the denial that Christ took flesh of the Virgin Mary. Joan of

Kent, for instance, who was an Anabaptist and not a Baptist, was burnt at the stake because of this very denial. The third characteristic of the Anabaptists had to do with ritual. It was re-baptism, or, rather, the doctrine that no baptism is valid which is not on profession of faith. Now of these three marks one only the Baptists share with the Anabaptists, that which has to do with the sacrament of baptism. And even in this particular it must be noted that whereas the Anabaptists generally practised affusion and not immersion, from the year 1642 the Baptists began generally to adopt immersion instead of affusion. The evolution of the Baptist Churches by self-differentiation of the Church in England, can then be traced without any dragging in of the Anabaptist movement. The two movements crossed one another at the point of baptism, each affirming that the subject of the rite must be a believer. But they had different origins and passed on to widely different destinies. Anabaptism was a revolt. The Baptist Church was the culmination of a national revival of religion.

So we now see how the life that visited the Church in England as the New Testament was studied, resulted in a rapid development of the Church, with differentiation. In every case the new-formed bodies made some real and distinctive contribution to Church life in England. We have now to ask what contribution the Baptists made. We shall see that the Baptists did chiefly one thing, a thing

widely momentous, incalculably effective, not only in the development of the Church in England, but in many directions, civil as well as ecclesiastical, at home and abroad. This first and great thing was the rescue and reassertion of the doctrine of conversion. Out of this sprang great movements, chief of which were (i.) the enunciation, for the first time in the history of the Church in England, of the full doctrine of religious liberty; (ii.) the modern missionary enterprise.

The centre of gravity of the Baptist conception of the Gospel and the Church was not, and is not, baptism, but conversion. The Baptist doctrine has always been, not to exalt baptism, but to exalt conversion; not to put baptism in the first place, but to put it in the second place; not to emphasise the material sign, but to emphasise the spiritual meaning; not to seek safety in ritual, but to make ritual the exultant signal of safety. Baptism without conversion is for the Baptists nothing and no baptism: conversion, even apart from baptism and without it, is the purpose of the Gospel and the commission of the Church. This is so quite irrespective of the particular theologies which Baptists have professed. For it is well to observe that the Baptist Churches have always tolerated within their own limits very wide differences of doctrine. The first Baptist church founded by John Smyth was Arminian in doctrine, while the church over which Spilsbury presided, and

from which the greater of the two Baptist denominations sprang, was Calvinistic. We will look at each of these bodies and see how each attached central importance to the doctrine of conversion.

First of all we will examine the place given by the General or Arminian Baptists to conversion. In John Smyth's *Long Confession of Faith*, which numbered one hundred Articles, and was published posthumously in 1613, we read :—

> "That original sin is an idle term.
> "That infants are conceived and born in innocency without sin, and that so dying are undoubtedly saved, and that this is to be understood of all infants. . . .
> "That . . . God doth not create or predestinate any man to destruction.
> "That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. . . .
> "That . . . the sacrifice of Christ's body and blood . . . doth not reconcile God unto us, which did never hate us, nor was our enemy, but reconcileth us unto God. . . .
> "That Christ was delivered to death for our sins. . . .
> "That the efficacy of Christ's death is only derived to them which do mortify their sins.
> "That repentance is the change of the mind from evil to that which is good. . . .
> "That the outward baptism of water is to be administered only upon such penitent and faithful persons as are aforesaid, and not upon infants, or wicked persons.
> "That in baptism to the penitent person and believer there is presented and figured . . . the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire.

> "That the outward baptism and supper do not confer or convey grace and regeneration. . . .
> "That the sacraments have the same use that the word hath; that they are a visible word. . . ."

A second illustration I will take from one of the very earliest publications of the General Baptists, Leonard Busher's tract entitled *Religion's Peace, or a Plea for Liberty of Conscience*, published in 1614. This tract is addressed to King James I., and among its opening paragraphs we find the following sentences :—

> "In all humility, therefore, I give you to understand, that no prince or people can possibly attain that one true religion of the Gospel . . . merely by birth. For Christ saith, *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*. . . . Therefore Christ commanded this word to be preached to all nations, that thereby they may attain the new birth. . . . Christ will have his ministers to preach and teach the people of all nations . . . repentance and remission of sins, and to baptize in his name such as believe."

What is true of the General or Arminian Baptists is true also of the Particular or Calvinistic Baptists. The real point at issue between them and all other Churchmen in England was not the mode of baptism, but its proper subject, *i.e.* the believer, and no person incapable of belief (as is an infant). The key to the understanding of their whole position and history is the fact that they saw that the experience

of the individual, in consciously turning from sin and accepting Christ, alone gives significance to the Gospel, the Church, the ministry, and the Sacraments.

One of the earliest Confessions of Faith of the Particular Baptists is that called *A Confession of Faith of those Churches which are commonly (though falsely) called Anabaptists.*" It was first published in 1644, and was signed among others by Spilsbury, Richardson, and Wm. Kiffen. The following extracts from Articles 25 to 41 indicate the respective places given in this Confession to conversion and baptism. After a series of Articles displaying a theology radically different from Smyth's Arminianism, with its denial of original sin, we read :—

"The preaching of the Gospel to the conversion of sinners is absolutely free ; no way requiring as absolutely necessary, any qualifications, preparations, or terrors of the law, or preceding ministry of the law ; but only and alone the naked soul, a sinner and ungodly, to receive Christ crucified, dead, and buried, and risen again, who is made a Prince and a Saviour for such sinners as through the Gospel shall be brought to believe on him" (25). "All believers are by Christ united to God, by which union God is one with them and they are one with him. . . ." (27). "All believers are a holy and sanctified people. . . ." (29). "All believers in the time of this life are in a continual warfare and combat against sin, self, the world, and the devil ; and are liable to all manner of afflictions . . . and whatsoever the saints possess or enjoy of God

spiritually, is by faith; and outward and temporal things are lawfully enjoyed by a civil right by them who have no faith" (31). "Jesus Christ hath here on earth a spiritual kingdom, which is his Church . . . which is a company of visible saints, called and separated from the world by the word and Spirit of God, to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel, being baptized into that faith, and joined to the Lord, and each to other, by mutual agreement, in the practical enjoyment of the ordinances commanded by Christ their head and king" (33). "To this Church he hath made his promises . . ." (34). "Every church hath power given them from Christ, for their well-being, to choose among themselves meet persons for pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons" (36). "Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, given by Christ, to be dispensed upon persons professing faith, . . . who upon profession of faith, ought to be baptized, and after to partake of the Lord's Supper" (39).

Here we see clearly that the whole conception of the Church is based upon the experience of conversion. Members must be converted people, ministers are chosen by members, the sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper alike, to be administered to converted people only. The Particular Baptists, then, differentiated themselves from other Churchmen in England, not upon their notion as to the mode of baptism, but upon their sense of the unspeakable importance of personal faith and conversion.

If we have this in mind, all the subsequent developments of the Baptist movement in England

are explained, and each such development illustrates the place of conversion in Baptist doctrine and practice. We discover the secret of the power alike of John Bunyan's preaching and of his allegories when we remark the place which he as a Baptist gives to conversion in his whole theological outlook. Christian's personal and individual reception of Calvary is the central fact in his journey from Destruction to Heaven. So too, Dan Taylor, who reorganised the General Baptists in 1770 into a New Connexion after the main body of the old General Baptist Churches had lapsed into Unitarianism, gained his striking power by the preaching of conversion, and so with Andrew Fuller, John Ryland, Robert Hall, and Charles Haddon Spurgeon in our own times.

Closely related to this, a curious collateral consequence of the peculiar emphasis placed by Baptists on the doctrine of conversion may be briefly noted. Preaching was to them the supreme function. They had to call men to repentance and faith. They called their pastors then by preference "Preachers," while the Independents held to the word "minister." Among the Baptists of the Continent this custom is still maintained, though it came into existence quite independently of British influence, and in Germany, Russia, Austria, Hungary, and other parts, the minister is always known as Preacher So-and-so.

We must now turn to look at this more in detail, and see how this Baptist contribution to the religious life of these times has operated in various directions. The Baptist Churches came into being at a time of religious intolerance. Their central doctrine reacted immediately upon this, and resulted in an event momentous not only to the Church in England, but to the Church universal, viz. the enunciation of the full doctrine of religious liberty. This doctrine is the logical and necessary outcome of the Baptist theological position. It is involved in that position quite apart from any persecutions to which Baptists as such were exposed, and the persecutions themselves only gave the occasion for its proper elaboration. It is sometimes suggested that the cry for toleration and indeed liberty of worship came naturally from those who suffered persecution. This is only true in a limited fashion. The natural plea of the persecuted is not that persecution is essentially and absolutely wrong, but that it is wrongly applied to them. Romanists, Puritans, Presbyterians, and Independents alike claimed toleration and liberty for themselves, but they did not offer it to every one. When Roger Williams, the founder of the American Baptist Churches, went to New England, he found that the Puritan exiles were by no means enamoured of toleration, but, on the contrary, very ready to persecute, *e.g.*, Quakers, and consequently he was forced to found the new colony of Rhode Island

in order to secure the liberty he desired. The reluctance with which many Separatists regarded the idea of religous liberty may be illustrated by the saying of Catherine Chidley, a great publicist in New England about 1640, who in answer to the *reductio ad absurdam* that if Separatists were tolerated Jews and Anabaptists [meaning Baptists] must also be tolerated, merely said: "For my part I speak for myself, and I suppose that they may say as much for themselves." In contra-distinction from this characteristic attitude among English Churchmen of all denominations up to 1612, was the Baptist position which was first put into a Confession by John Smyth when he said, "That the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force or compel men to this or that form of religion or doctrine: but . . . to handle only civil transgressions." Why did John Smyth and his fellows come to this conclusion? Was it, as Professor Gardiner says, "because they were exposed to contempt and persecution"? No, for they were not alone in this suffering, though they were alone in this teaching. The real dynamic which drove them to their position was the faith they had in the centrality of conversion, their belief that all depended on the Lordship of Christ in the individual soul, and that for the civil magistrate to challenge soul-liberty was *ultra vires*. John Smyth bases the Article which I quoted just now

thus: "The magistrate is not to meddle with matters of conscience . . . for Christ only is the king and lawgiver of the Church and conscience." Leonard Busher put the matter in a still more pointed way in his *Plea for Liberty of Conscience*, that noble tract which has never been surpassed for its lofty handling of the whole question. His argument is briefly this: Men become Christians by the new birth, not by natural birth. But the new birth is the effect of the preaching of the Word and the work of the Spirit. Fire and sword and penal laws cannot defend or maintain or propagate the Gospel. Persecution must be inimical to the work of the Spirit, it can in no circumstances carry Christ's commission, but must in all circumstances be antichristian. This grand argument for liberty of conscience, first published by Busher, was carried on thereafter by a succession of Baptist pamphleteers, some of them, like Morton, being General Baptists, and others, like Samuel Richardson, Particular Baptists. It is well we should clearly understand the largeness of this notion of religious liberty. The Baptist writers asserted it on the simple grounds (i.) that conversion could not be forced, and so no doctrine, however right, should be backed by temporal power, and (ii.) that all converted people, to whatever particular doctrinal or ritual or Church order they belonged, had to answer for their faith solely to their King Christ Jesus. This second ground made persecution

among Christians abhorrent, while the first urged that liberty of conscience must be universal. I may be permitted to dwell upon this, because it is a common illusion that Baptists are narrow and uncharitable in their relations with other Churchmen. In point of fact, the exact contrary is the case. Here is an extract from John Smyth's *Long Confession* : " All penitent, faithful Christians are brethren in the communion of the outward Church, wheresoever they live, by what name soever they are known, which, in truth and zeal, follow repentance and faith, though compassed with never so many ignorances and infirmities ; and we salute them all with an holy kiss." Up to the present day Baptists have always been marked with readiness to co-operate with all Christian people. A further interesting illustration of this we may cull from the correspondence which Dr. Peter Chamberlen, the Baptist physician to Charles II., entered upon with the Archbishop of Canterbury urging measures towards Christian Unity. The time had come, he said, when they should find, " not how far they can Differ and Quarrel Each other, but How Close they can Unite and become all of Christ." This was in 1682.

The results of this doctrine of liberty of conscience were momentous. The doctrine impinged immediately upon political life. It protested against all differentiation in civil matters between the holders of varying religious beliefs, and inevitably

carried its professors on toward a very high view of civil liberty, accentuating and reinforcing the doctrines already promulgated by Independents. Tyranny was to the Baptists evil whether exercised by a King or a Protector, and while Baptists took a considerable part in the struggle against Charles I., their stand against Cromwell in some of his later acts is still more significant. Firth, in his *Last Years of the Protectorate*, tells us how the Baptist congregations and ministers petitioned Cromwell against allowing himself to be made King. He tells us also how, when Cromwell had finally dissolved his last Parliament, he called his officers together to persuade them that his policy was for the good of religion and the freedom of worship. Thereupon one captain, a Baptist, "said plainly that if he could not have liberty of conscience without the nation's losing their civil liberties, he would risk it, or seek for it elsewhere."

This love of religious liberty, which made devotion to civil liberty stronger than ever by belief in the central importance of conversion and the sole Lordship of King Jesus in matters of religion, had far-reaching effects. It speedily won its way amongst all Separatists, and by and by was taken up by politicians and philosophers like John Locke. It became to some extent incorporated in the British law system after 1688, and, largely through the writings of the philosophers, was taken up into the teaching of Frenchmen like Jean Jacques Rousseau,

and so, through the French Revolution, modified in a liberalising sense the whole development of Western political institutions. Meanwhile the doctrine was carried to America by Roger Williams, who incorporated it into the constitution of his new colony of Rhode Island (the first State in history to stand for complete religious liberty). This constitution it was which gave to the framers of the constitution of the United States their model in the matter of the relations between State and Church, so that the part played by American influence in the political upheaval in Europe which began with the French Revolution, leads us back at last to the same fountain-head — the centrality of conversion and the doctrine of religious liberty which was deduced from that, and which strengthened greatly the doctrine of civil liberty too.

So we come into view of the first, though not perhaps most notable, reaction of the Baptist conception of the Church as determined by the centrality of conversion. It reacted upon the law of the land to make for greater liberty. The Baptist plea for liberty of conscience did not, however, gain an immediate response from Government. With the short interval of the Commonwealth, Baptists were persecuted in England, along with many other types of Churchmen, for generations. The immediate question for the first Baptists was, then, not whether they ought to be tolerated, but whether they could survive intolerance. And here

they were undoubtedly assisted by that very tenet which called for liberty—the centrality of conversion. They were not a large body. They never have been a very considerable proportion of the population of these islands. But they were a compact and chosen body. They had to stand the test of public confession by the ordeal of immersion. None but a man of deep conviction and real religious experience would join them, so that in persecution they would be unlikely to lose many of their adherents as renegades. And this tenacity of purpose they did exemplify through all those bitter decades, and not only did they hold their own, but in the two reigns that followed the Commonwealth actually made considerable progress. It must in justice be noted, however, that the Baptists fully entered upon the faults which corresponded to their virtues. They had more than their share of turbulent and militant advocates who could not endure persecution with patience and meekness. Baptist preachers and Baptist laymen were from 1660 to 1672 but too ready to conspire and rebel, and men like Pooley, Blood, Gower, and Wigan, brought much disrepute upon their fellows. At the same time, it is well to remember that Baptists as a whole had no sympathy with these turbulent souls.

We now turn to consider the second great contribution to the life of the Church made by the Baptist Churches by virtue of their peculiar belief in the

centrality of conversion. The first was religious liberty. The second we shall now see to be foreign missionary enterprise. The time of trial in which the first generations of Baptists lived came at last to an end, and as the Baptists gained the opportunity of peaceful development, a testing-time of a very different order began. The pressure from outside being largely removed, among the General Baptists and Particular Baptists alike tendencies adverse to their real genius arose. The General Baptists were afflicted with Socinianism and the Particular Baptists with hyper-Calvinism, each heresy setting the centrality of conversion aside, with the result that "Baptist preachers ceased largely to warn, exhort, and invite sinners, and a dry rot set in." The General Baptists declined from a membership of 20,000 in Charles II.'s reign to 10,000 in George II.'s. The Particular Baptists also suffered. Of course we must remember that religion throughout England was now at a very low ebb. It would be surprising, however, to find that Baptists did not suffer more than others, for the loss of faith in conversion meant to them the loss of all.

The Baptists won through this time of testing with the help of that great spiritual revival associated with the Wesleys. No sooner had this quickening swept through the land than the Baptists saw as in a new blaze of glory their own peculiar faith. The time of reaction passed, and a new

chapter of extraordinary usefulness began for the Baptist Churches. Indeed, it may be said that not till now, the third quarter of the eighteenth century, did the Baptists thoroughly appreciate and put into action the real significance and range of their own doctrine of conversion. Coming back again to this great doctrine, they saw afresh what the few Baptists of the first years had indeed seen, but had never had leisure or means to put into practice. This was the great duty of the Church to preach the Gospel to all the world, or, to use technical terms now in vogue, the duty of foreign missionary enterprise. The modern foreign mission movement was then the second great contribution made by the Baptists by virtue of their fundamental faith in conversion. True, this faith was quickened in them by the Wesleyan revival, but the fact remains that the pioneers in the missionary movement were Baptists. In 1792, after an agitation extending over several years, the Baptist Missionary Society was founded under the leadership of William Carey and Andrew Fuller. It is unnecessary to speak at length of William Carey, the cobbler preacher of Moulton, in Northampton, who, in seven years, with hardly any help from any teacher, learned enough of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, and Dutch to read readily in those languages. It is well to remember, however, how greatly he laboured. When he arrived in India he so set himself to the study of languages for the purposes

of Biblical translation, that he not only became the greatest linguist of India, but himself produced versions of the Bible in Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi, and Marathi; and during his lifetime, and under his supervision, the Serampore press, which he established, issued the Bible, or portions of it, in thirty-six languages or dialects. But we have not to deal now with William Carey or any other individual.

What we have to ask is, how came it that the virile, purposeful missionary movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries should have its origin in the Baptist churches? Was it accidental that Baptists rather than others should do this great thing? No, it was the natural working-out of the central principle of the Baptists, the doctrine that individual man needs conversion, and that the Church exists to call men to conversion. The idea of the world-wide missionary function of the Church was already there in the grand conceptions of the first Baptist pioneers, as well as in the act of the removal of their first church from Amsterdam to London.[1] It was there implicitly in any case, but more than that, it was to a large extent explicit also. Listen to what Leonard

[1] "It was a true evangelical impulse dictated the return in 1611 . . . bonds and afflictions awaited them, but they held not their life of any account dear to themselves, so that they might accomplish their course and the ministry which they received from the Lord Jesus."—Principal Gould, M.A., in *The Tercentenary of the Modern Baptist Denomination.*

Busher says in his tract "Religion's Peace": "For Christ saith, *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* . . . Therefore Christ commanded this word to be preached to all nations, that thereby they may attain the new birth." That he had plainly in view the ultimate preaching of the gospel in non-Christian lands is to be seen in his plea that the persecution of those who preach the gospel at home must be a great hindrance when preachers come to non-Christian lands, "for," says Busher, "thereby are the Jews, Turks, and pagans occasioned and encouraged to persecute likewise all such as preach and teach Christ in their dominions." To every Baptist it must be clear that it was the duty of Christians to convert men of every nationality and religion to Christ, and it only needed a man of high courage and imagination, reflecting upon the Baptist position and the state of the world, to discover that he and his fellow-Churchmen were called upon to take practical measures to secure the conversion of the heathen. Such a man was William Carey. In 1789 he wrote his *Inquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen.* Four years after, Carey himself, in company with a physician named Thomas, set sail for India to attempt the fulfilment of the great commission which enjoins the teaching and baptizing of all nations.

The effect of this epoch-making action of the

small and despised Baptist body was tremendous. It passed through the whole Church in England with quickening energy. The formation of the Baptist Missionary Society was rapidly followed by the formation of the London Missionary Society, and then by others. The Edinburgh Conference indicates in sufficiently dramatic fashion the extent to which Carey's initiative has been a blessing, not only to all Christian life in England, but to all the world, and also shows how a daring and thorough obedience to their own distinctive doctrine has done more to realise the dream of Christian Unity which many Baptists like Peter Chamberlen cherished, than any amount of zealous denunciation of those who rejected that doctrine.

Having seen these two great contributions to Christendom made by virtue of the doctrine of conversion, we have to ask whether modern Baptists stand for the same principle. The answer is emphatically "Yes." The general movements of the three hundred years during which Baptist churches have flourished in this country, have resulted in three main modifications of the Baptist position. All of these modifications, however, have tended to enhance the central Baptist principle. We can do no more than glance rapidly at them.

1. The first has to do with the subordination of doctrinal differences in view of the common religious experience to which conversion testifies. We have seen that two groups of Baptists existed

originally—the one Arminian and the other Calvinistic. These two bodies are now fused into one, in which no doctrinal test is recognised. Baptist churches in the same town are very different in respect of theology, and yet communicate with one another in the most unreserved and brotherly fashion. It is fully recognised that the one important thing is the new creature, and that repentance and faith are compatible with an indefinite variety of doctrinal positions. It is in harmony with this that we have long since ceased to draw up and issue Confessions of Faith. The Baptists have no creed that is authoritative for all. Again, this emphasises the Baptist insistence on conversion. It is the understanding that members must be converted people, that makes it possible to go on happily without doctrinal tests. Of course there are Baptist remnants that do not share this spirit to the full, but they are relatively insignificant.

2. The next modification has to do with the elimination among many Baptists of baptism itself as a condition of church-fellowship, conversion being left as the sole qualification. The fact that baptism is only secondary to conversion has been signalised in recent years by the tendency (startling enough to Churchmen of all other types) to make it otiose, or, more strictly, to make baptism and church-membership independent of one another, so that baptism is no longer the way into the Church at all, even for the believer. Since the middle of last

century, under the influence chiefly of Robert Hall, there has grown up within the Baptist denomination what are called "open fellowship churches." These churches open their membership to those who have not been baptized. This does not mean that they recognise infant baptism. It simply means that they look upon every converted person, every believer, as eligible to church-membership whether baptized or not. Such churches are growing rapidly; they still administer baptism, but they do not administer it as a condition of church-fellowship, believing that if made a condition of church-fellowship its voluntary character is infringed upon —and, indeed, the rite tends to take the place of faith.

3. The third has to do with organisation. The Baptist position has been modified, or, rather, consolidated by the formation of the Baptist World Alliance.

Though the Baptist churches are independent, and recognise no authority outside the individual local congregation which can override the decisions of that local church, such as an episcopate, a presbytery, or a conference, they have always sought to band themselves together in a confederacy of mutual help and comfort. Churches within easy reach of one another have formed themselves into associations, so that now the whole of the United Kingdom is divided into a number of such associations, each comprising a county or some group of

counties. And beyond this there are national unions—the Welsh, Scottish, and Irish Baptist Unions, and the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. The growth of the Baptist movement has, however, been so great during the nineteenth century that in 1905 the Baptist World Alliance was formed. This Alliance comprises some seven million actual adult members of Baptist churches, and, together with adherents, represents at least twenty million souls whose spiritual life, Christian character, missionary ideals, and Churchmanship are nurtured by means of the Baptist churches. These seven million church members are distributed over the world as follows :—

Europe, about 600,000 ; Asia, about 200,000 ; Africa, about 15,000 ; America, about 6,000,000 ; Australasia, about 28,000. In Asia and Africa the Baptist churches are in the main controlled by missionaries, and are the creation of the men who are foreigners in the land of their activities. In America and Australasia the Baptist churches were originally founded by emigrants from Great Britain, though in the case of America this statement should have some modification. It is on the continent of Europe that the rise of Baptist churches is at once the most interesting and instructive, for we can to-day watch in various parts of Europe exactly that process going on which we know formed the first Baptist churches of England. The European Baptist churches are to be found in the following

countries apart from Great Britain and Ireland: Austria, 6 churches; Spain, 7; Switzerland, 7; Roumania and Bulgaria, 11; Holland, 23; Denmark, 31; Norway, 40; France, with Belgium and French Switzerland, 43; Italy, 53; Finland, 54; Hungary, 68; Germany, 226; Russia, 296; and Sweden, 607. In the case of Russia the figures given are probably far below the real facts. It is very difficult to get statistics, but we know that Baptist churches are to be found throughout the Russian Empire from Warsaw to Harbin.

How, it may be asked, did these Baptist churches come to be founded? Those in Spain, France, and Italy have been formed by direct action from England and America, though they are becoming rapidly more and more self-supporting. In the other countries, however, the churches have arisen more or less spontaneously. The bulk of them owe their life originally to a little group of men and women, led by Oncken, who formed a Baptist church in Hamburg about eighty years ago. This man Oncken, remarkable for his energy, piety, and eloquence, founded Baptist churches wherever German was spoken—in Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, and Russia. His converts also founded Baptist communities in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. In many parts of Europe, however, Baptist churches sprang up unaided by any kindling from without, as the direct result of the study of the New Testament. The whole story of the spread of Baptist

principles throughout Europe is fascinating and romantic to a degree, and it is possible for us to see in various parts of Europe exactly those conditions and processes at work which we know at various times obtained in this country. We can see Baptist churches in Russia thriving in spite of persecution, and standing boldly for religious liberty like British churches in the seventeenth century. We can see Baptist churches in Hungary, free, but suffering from those very dangers which beset the British Baptist churches in the eighteenth century. We can witness missionary zeal springing up everywhere as a proper understanding of the Baptist position is arrived at, so that peasant churches from the Balkans, Russian Baptists beyond the Urals, and the much-distressed and scattered Baptists of Austria, vie with the more prosperous and orderly German and Swedish Baptists in supporting foreign missionary enterprise. The importance of the fundamental doctrine of the Baptists is keenly realised by these continental brethren. The centrality of conversion is the secret of their strength, and believing in it they thrive and grow as does no other Christian body wholly independent of State support in these various lands—perhaps, we might say, as does no other Christian body on the Continent.

As this paper is brought to a close, it is worth while to hark back to the thought from which we started. The Baptists believe themselves Churchmen. They believe that the Church of Christ in England is

larger than any of the groups into which its members have been forced by the operation of historic processes in the national development. They believe that these processes are the work of the Holy Spirit, and that the various denominations are due to a differentiation of the Church at the bidding of the Holy Spirit—a differentiation resulting in the rediscovery and elaboration of a series of truths and principles profoundly valuable to the Church. They believe that one day the denominations will realise their essential unity in Christ, and that this shall be when each has appropriated those spiritual contributions which, by the grace of God, all the denominations have made to that Holy Catholic Church of which each is a part.

THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

BY

EDWARD GRUBB, M.A.

A "Mystical," or Experimental, Element Fundamental in Christianity from the Beginning.

Its affiliation with the prophetic (not the priestly) movement in Israel.

A Christian was one who had received the Spirit, with its ethical fruits.

This the privilege of all believers on equal terms.

The Church as the Association of such Believers. Causes of its Hardening into an Organisation, which resolutely repressed Independent Life.

Spiritual Nature of the Reformation, as a Return to the Primitive Experience.

But this in turn hardens into a system based on the outward authority of the Bible.

How the Soil of Human Hearts in the Countries of the Reformation was Prepared for the Preaching of the Quakers.

George Fox's Spiritual Experience a Recovery of First-Hand Knowledge of God.

Its ethical results in his own life and in that of his followers.

This (unknown to most of them) was a Recovery of the Essential Spirit of the Reformation.

But in two respects it went much further:

(i.) Fox based his whole Church polity on immediate revelation of the mind of God—his disuse of a separated ministry and sacraments.

(ii.) Immediate revelation (in some degree) the privilege of *all* men. "Universal and Saving Light."

The Social and Ethical Results of this Belief: Missionary Effort and "Philanthropy" its Necessary Outcome.

How the Quakers reconciled it with their Evangelical Experience of Salvation through Christ: their Thoughts moved on Johannine Lines.

Insistence on inward as contrasted with merely forensic righteousness.

But there is a Fundamental Weakness in their Theoretical Position, especially as to the Seat of Authority: the Spirit not a "Rule" of Faith and Practice.

Source of this antinomy to be found in their failure to transcend seventeenth-century dualism.

Doctrine of Divine Immanence, expressed in its terms, led to the infallibility of the individual.

Unfortunate Results of this Weakness, especially in Disparagement of Need for Religious Teaching.

Yet the survival of the Society, and its present hopefulness, is evidence of the depth and reality of its Evangelical experience.

THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

I FEEL profoundly my inability, through lack of the necessary historical and theological knowledge, to treat this great subject as it deserves; and yet even a very modest contribution to this course of lectures, from a point of view which is rather different from that of any of the other speakers, may not be altogether valueless.

Two recent experiences have added courage for undertaking a very difficult and rather presumptuous task. A few years ago, when I was President of a local Free Church Council, I received several invitations to speak at Sunday evening services of Baptists and Congregationalists, on "The Message of the Society of Friends to its Sister Churches"; and on each occasion the testimony was spontaneously given by some of my hearers, "Why, that is exactly what we believe ourselves." And when, rather later, I published a little book on the subject of authority in religion, some of the warmest expressions of appreciation came from men and women of High Church sympathies in the Anglican communion. These two facts may serve to show how far we have travelled, in the direction

of inward unity and mutual understanding, since the days, two hundred and fifty years ago, when a Churchman denounced the Quakers as "a sect lately bred as vermin out of the putrid matter and corruptions of former times," [1] and when the saintly Richard Baxter could ask, "Was there ever a generation of men on whom the image of the devil was more visible than on these (Quakers)?" [2] There is, undoubtedly, deep hidden beneath all our surface differences, a fellowship of those who are seeking the same truth, who worship the same Lord, who have been baptized into some measure of the same Christian experience; and my most earnest desire is that these lectures may do something to deepen and broaden the sense of unity in the "one flock" that is gathered under the "one Shepherd" from many folds.

I am quite unable to speak as an expert in Christian history; but it will, I suppose, be admitted by almost every one that a "mystical," or experimental, element has been fundamental in genuine Christianity from its earliest days. It is clear from the Synoptic Gospels that the religion of Jesus Christ and His disciples was linked on by the closest ties to the *prophetic* movement in Hebrew history; that it had little connexion with the priestly and ceremonial development

[1] From the Index to Samuel Fisher's *Rusticus ad Academicos* (1660), an Apologia addressed to two Anglican clergymen.

[2] From *The Quaker's Catechism* (1657).

which went on alongside of the prophetic; that it found its expression in the synagogue worship rather than in the temple with its sacrifices. The essence of "prophecy," if I understand it rightly, was the sense of a direct and personal touch from the Spirit of God, bringing with it illumination and revelation. In the Acts of the Apostles Peter declares, on the Day of Pentecost, that the time of which the prophet Joel foretold has now arrived; that this direct and personal experience of the Spirit and of revelation is now no longer the privilege of a few highly endowed souls, but is poured out alike upon the servants and the handmaidens, that is, upon *all* who have come by faith into the true filial relation to God through Jesus Christ.

As Harnack says: "Jesus sought to kindle *independent* religious life, and He did kindle it; yes, that is His peculiar greatness, that He led men to God so that they lived their own life with Him."[1] The unique feature of the life of Jesus Christ is His personal experience of Sonship with God; and this experience He offered to be shared by all who would come into a right relation with Himself. The religion of His followers was, at bottom, the fellowship of those who had found in Him their true filial relation to God, who knew that in Jesus God had come to them and revealed Himself to them as their Father, their Guide, their Great Companion. A Christian in the Acts of the Apostles is one who has received the

[1] *The Essence of Christianity.*

Spirit. It is because Cornelius and his friends have received the gift of the Holy Ghost that they are claimed by St. Peter as fit candidates for baptism by water, and the claim is clearly felt to be unanswerable (Acts x. 44–48). In St. Paul's Epistles it is "as many as are led by the Spirit of God" who "are the sons of God" (Rom. viii. 14). In the First Epistle of St. John "we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He gave us" (iii. 24).

Now, if we ask what this reception of, or baptism with, the Holy Spirit exactly meant, it is clear we must go behind its outward manifestations in such a disturbance of the normal spiritual equilibrium as is indicated in the "gift of tongues" (whatever that may have been), to the inward condition of which this disturbance was the expression. It produced, indeed, an excitement which might be mistaken for physical intoxication (Eph. v. 18); but its real "fruit" was ethical: it was to be known by its power to yield "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, meekness, self-control" (Gal. v. 22). It was, essentially, a change in the inward man from control by the "flesh" to control by the "Spirit" (Rom. viii. 5–9); it was the replacement of the spirit of self-seeking with the spirit of love to God and man. "We know that we have passed out of death into life *because we love the brethren*" (1 John iii. 14). And this deep ethical change, wrought in the inmost heart of every one who

received the love of God in Christ, carried with it an illumination, a clearness of spiritual vision, and a moral energy, that raised the man to a wholly new level of insight, efficiency, and power. It was "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him," by which "the eyes of the heart" were "enlightened" (Eph. i. 17, 18); a "strengthening with power by His Spirit in the inward man" (Eph. iii. 16).

New Testament religion, then, if I have begun to apprehend it rightly, centred in this experience of God revealed in Jesus direct to the individual soul. "Christianity in the golden age," says Dr. Rufus M. Jones, "was essentially a rich and vivid consciousness of God, rising to a perfect experience of union with God in mind and heart and will." [1] The privilege of this direct experience of God, reproducing His own life in the soul, was opened up by Jesus Christ to every believer on equal terms. In Him there is "neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female" (Gal. iii. 28). I find no trace in the New Testament of any apostolic or priestly caste, who were to be the medium of communication of this Divine "grace" to the laity. Or, rather, there is no "laity," for *all* have the priestly privilege of direct access to God. Nor do I find any trace of insistence on special ceremonies as the channels by which the grace of God is to reach men's souls. There

[1] *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 4.

is poetry, indeed, there is symbolism; the things that are seen are made, as by the insight of genius, to carry the truth of the unseen; but I find absolutely no material which can be used to discuss the question what is, or what is not, a "valid" sacrament.

And what of the Church? There is no sign that I can discover in the New Testament of any idea of the Church as a single, universal, visible organisation, wielding authority over the souls of men as the only medium through which God could communicate with them. The "Church" of the New Testament appears to me to be simply the natural association, in the happy fellowship of a common experience and a common love, of those who have been brought, each for himself and herself, into vital union with Jesus Christ. In Pauline thought it is a living organism of which Christ is the head; in Johannine it consists of the branches that have their life in Him, the Vine; but there is nothing in all this of what we have learnt to associate with the word "ecclesiastical."

As Dr. Rufus Jones says, again: "The Church itself, as seen in its simplest conception, is a mystical fellowship, formed and gathered, not by the will of man, but by direct revelation of God in the soul. The first spiritual stone in the structure, which is to defy time and death, is a person who is *chosen* because by revelation he has discovered the Divine in the human; and with only one stone ready

Christ sees the spiritual building of the ages rising and reaching beyond the power of death. Each believer is a mystical stone. . . . In a word, the authority is within the spiritual soul, and not external to it. Each member is crowned and mitred." [1]

It is needless now to trace, even if I had the knowledge to do it, the process by which, as the glow of the first happy experience faded, the early Church, the brotherhood of all believers, became hardened into a rigid system, a great spiritual *imperium*, whereby a graded hierarchy of bishops and priests bore sway over the souls and lives of men. Such a change may seem to have been necessitated by "the hardness of men's hearts," and the paramount need for safeguarding the Church against false teaching, in the shape, mainly, of an Oriental "gnosis" which threatened to evaporate the water of life into clouds of intellectual speculation. However this may have been, of the fact there can be no question—that the Church very quickly changed, and that by the end of the second century she was suppressing as heresy the attempt of the Montanists—associated, no doubt, with an admixture of extravagance and error—to reproduce the prophetic fervours of individual experience in which the Church itself had had its origin.

From that time forward, every attempt to return

[1] *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 7.

to the simplicity and spontaneity of the early Christian consciousness, to revive the freedom of personal experience and inspiration of which Paul testifies in his letters to his friends at Corinth, was regarded as a danger to Church order, and was usually stamped out as heresy. There was, of course, a deep vein of mysticism in many of the Greek Fathers, and even in Augustine; and here and there a prominent Churchman, like John the Scot in the ninth century, contrived with difficulty to hold his position while giving utterance to thoughts and experiences that were independent of priest or outward authority. There was probably never a time when deep personal piety, and the consciousness of a direct touch with God, altogether died out in the Church that called itself by the name of Christ; and now and then, in a St. Francis of Assisi or a St. Catherine of Siena, the genuine flame of first-hand inspiration and revelation broke out once more as a light in a darkened age, bringing back to men something of the freshness and glow of the early experience. But every movement that suggested *basing Christian life and practice* on this direct consciousness of the Spirit, and dispensing with the forms and regulations of the dominant Church, was stamped out with a heavy hand. I need only mention the Waldenses in Northern Italy, the Albigenses of Southern France, and Wiclif and the Lollards in England—all of whom, in one way or another, sought after a return from

the bondage of ecclesiasticism to the freedom, the simplicity, and the purity, of the early days of Christianity.

The greatest of all these movements, "the Reformation," which we associate with the name of Luther, was in essence, if I understand it rightly, the recovery of the consciousness of personal access to God through faith in Christ, apart altogether from the institutions of the organised Church. As the late Auguste Sabatier says :—

> "He (Luther) found salvation in ignoring the institution and entering into personal, direct, and immediate relations with the Master of Souls and the Author of life and grace." [1]

The Reformation recovered for men that free and joyous entrance into personal Christian experience, in which the soul of man no longer grovelled before the authority of the Church, but stood erect in the immediate presence of God. This is the secret of its power and joy and triumph. But, unhappily, its promise was only partially made good. As in the early Church, the first glow of experience faded, and the successors of Luther and his fellow-Reformers were faced with the necessity of making good their position, on the one hand against the mighty power of Rome, and on the other against the wilder spirits who were turning the new-found liberty into the anarchy of indi-

[1] *Religions of Authority*, etc., p. 151.

vidual licence. To fight this double battle they had recourse to the weapon that lay nearest to their hands, and gradually substituted, for the authority of an infallible Church, that of an infallible "Word of God" which they found in the canon of Scripture.

Nominally they held to the position of Luther and Zwingli and Calvin, that the ultimate authority is not without, but within, and is to be found in the "testimony of the Spirit," which shines upon the pages of the Bible, and brings home to the soul an indubitable witness of its truth. The Reformed Confessions of Faith taught that the books of the Bible are to be known as the Word of God, "not so much because of the unanimous consent of the Church, as in virtue of the inward witness and persuasion of the Holy Spirit, by whom we are made wise to discover and set apart these from other ecclesiastical books." [1]

But in practice this was too often ignored and forgotten, and the Bible came to be set up as a purely external standard of infallible guidance to truth and duty. The early Reformers, as I have said, had recovered the light and warmth of primitive Christianity by discovering the seat of authority within and not without, in the Christian consciousness and not in the infallible *dicta* of Pope or Council. But in the stress of controversy this living and inward testimony to truth and goodness was

[1] Quoted by A. Sabatier, *Religions of Authority*, etc., p. 159.

once more replaced by an external witness, removed further than ever from the heart that hungers for certitude. The final authority was to be found not in the present experience of the renewed soul with its purified vision, not even in any present and living organisation that could guide and teach by expressing the mind of God in relation to new conditions as they arose ; it was enshrined within the covers of a book to which no chapter had been added for fifteen hundred years. The logical outcome of this, which became the Puritan position, was that the living God was removed far into the distant past ; that His voice was no longer audible ; that He had ceased to speak to men when the Bible was completed ; that His revelation of Himself to men had become a fossil, stored carefully in a museum of antiquities.

Men are constantly better than their creeds, and I do not for one moment suggest that many who in theory held this dreary dogma had not in practice a real and vital communion with the living God. But the result of their preaching was that thousands of hungry souls "looked up and were not fed" ; that the lands where the Reformation had taken root were filled with "seekers" who were asking and hungering for the true bread from heaven and could not find it. Scattered communities of men and women in revolt from the authorities of their day, like the "Family of Love" and the Anabaptists, professed to have found for themselves an

immediate revelation ; but in too many cases their lives and conduct disgraced their profession, and, like the excesses that followed the French Revolution, drove back austere and timid souls to outward authorities to safeguard them from the dangers of liberty.

So it was that, in the middle of the seventeenth century, the soil of human hearts, in these countries of the Reformation, was ready for a new sowing of the seed of the heavenly Kingdom. It was this that brought the seekers after God to listen in great crowds to the shepherd lad, George Fox, who told them of what he himself had found—that, when all the priests and all the "professors" had failed him, he had found "One, even Jesus Christ, who could speak to his condition." Fox came to them with no "New Theology," woven by processes of thought ; no lore of Schoolmen, gained from the study of books ; no dream of a coming catastrophe when the proud should be overturned and the saints should rule the earth. He did but tell them that Christ had met him ; that He had satisfied his inward hunger with the bread of His living presence ; that what he had found they could find also, for "Christ had come to teach His people Himself." They need not seek to find God through the words of learned divines or man-made preachers ; for He Himself was present with His light and truth in the depths of every human heart, and would reveal Himself to all who would but listen and obey.

The sanity and sobriety of the young preacher, the power and wisdom with which, though clearly untaught of men, he drew forth the inmost heart of meaning from the Scriptures, and thus met the arguments of opposers, and his constant insistence on "truth" and sincerity and resolute faithfulness to all the Divine requirements, drew many to him, and they began to find in their own experience that what he said was true. They came for themselves into the same light and knowledge that made all things new. They did not believe in the Light because they had heard of it from a preacher, or read about it in a book, but because they had entered into it and it shone upon them.

"These things (says Fox) I did not see by the help of man, nor by the letter, though they are written in the letter, but I saw them in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by His immediate Spirit and power, as did the holy men of God, by whom the Holy Scriptures were written. Yet I had no slight esteem of the Holy Scriptures, but they were very precious to me, for I was in that Spirit by which they were given forth; and what the Lord opened in me, I afterwards found was agreeable to them."[1]

This was the uniform testimony of Fox's converts, that what they had found was not a new doctrine, not a "notion" about God or Christ, not a theory of truth, but the very truth itself, which brought with it its own overwhelming conviction of reality.

[1] Fox's *Journal*, vol. i. p. 36.

James Nayler was one of the earliest to come under Fox's influence, and he wrote :—

"The New Man worships a God near at hand, who dwells in His Holy Temple, and he knows Him inwardly by His own Word, and not from accounts of others. It was thus that the holy men of God always knew Him, and they knew themselves to be the sons of God by the Spirit that He had given them. And he that is born of the Spirit now has that same Spirit dwelling in him and witnessing in him. He knows what he worships, and not any form and custom, for he hath an ear open to hear what the Spirit sayeth." [1]

Edward Burrough, who died in Newgate prison in 1662, at the age of twenty-eight, wrote as follows :—

"The Divine mystery of the infinite God is revealed and discovered in the hearts of men, and He hath given to us to enjoy and possess in ourselves a measure of that fullness which is in Himself, a measure of the same love, the same mercy, the same Divine nature. We who are begotten of Him bear His image and are partakers of His immortal substance ; and these things ye *know* if the immortal birth lives in you." [2]

The Divine light and power which these Mystics felt in themselves was no mere extravagance of spiritual libertinism, making them fancy, like the "Ranters" with whom they were often confounded, that they were independent of the moral law. The fruits of the Spirit were for them wholly ethical, as they were for the apostle; they lived by the

[1] From *Works*, p. 74. [2] From *Works*, p. 698.

Spirit and by the Spirit also they "walked in line." George Fox, arraigned before the magistrates at Derby in 1649, told them that it was Christ in them that alone could sanctify them. "Then (he says) they ran into many words; but I told them *they were not to dispute of God and Christ, but to obey Him.*" [1]

Robert Barclay, in his *Apology*, thus describes what it was that made him a Quaker :—

"When I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart; and as I gave way unto it, *I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up*, and so I became thus knit and united unto them, hungering more and more after the increase of this power and life, whereby I might feel myself perfectly redeemed." [2]

The ethical "fruits of the Spirit" were abundantly brought forth in the lives of these early Quakers, and this was often unwillingly recognised even by their adversaries. They were scarcely ever charged with immoral conduct, and in the few occasions when such a charge was brought they had no difficulty in rebutting it. The wild doings of the "Ranters" they consistently condemned. James Nayler's lapse from sobriety of action they never condoned, and he himself heartily repented of it. The charges which brought them heavy suffering, in the shape of the loss of property and

[1] *Journal*, vol. i. p. 50. [2] *Apology*, Prop. xi. section 7.

terrible imprisonments, were for the most part such as these: of "blasphemy" or "infidelity" (*i.e.* denying the Scriptures to be the "Word of God"); of being Papists in disguise; of disloyalty to the Government (because they refused to take a judicial oath); of contempt of court (because they declined to remove their hats, or say "you" to a single person). The courage with which they endured, while never courting, persecution, is one of the finest evidences of the depth of their conviction and their loyalty to what "the Truth" required. Their high standard of honour became so well known that they were frequently left unguarded, or passed from one prison to another without escort, simply upon their promise to appear.

And the depth and reality of their inward experience is manifested in the joy that was with them in the midst of their sufferings. When Margaret Fell was in prison at Lancaster, threatened with the loss of all her property under the terrible charge of *premunire*, and when she had heard that her daughter Mary was ill in London, probably with the plague, she wrote to another daughter:—

"Keep down all unworthy anxieties. . . . Let not sorrow fill your hearts, for we have all cause to rejoice in the Lord evermore, and I most of all."

And James Nayler, after suffering a terrible punishment for his fall into extravagance, of which

(as I have said) he bitterly and sincerely repented, used these memorable words of love and forgiveness to his persecutors :—

"There is a spirit which I feel, that delights to do no evil, nor to revenge any wrong, but delights to endure all things, in hope to enjoy its own in the end. Its hope is to outlive all wrath and contention, and to weary out all exaltation and cruelty, or whatever is of a nature contrary to itself. It sees to the end of all temptations; as it bears no evil in itself, so it conceives none in thoughts to any other. If it be betrayed, it bears it, for its ground and spring is in the mercies and forgiveness of God. Its crown is meekness, its life is everlasting love unfeigned; it takes its kingdom with entreaty, and not with contention, and keeps it with lowliness of mind." [1]

It may be questioned whether the spirit of the Crucified has ever expressed itself in nobler language.

Such are typical expressions, culled from the writings or recorded utterances of these early Quakers. With the exception of Barclay, few of them possessed historical knowledge, and they did not know that their affirmation of the immediate presence and light in their souls of the Holy Spirit was but a repetition, in other terms, of much that had been expressed before them by the early Reformers and even by many of the Catholic Mystics. I do not forget that the note

[1] *Works*, p. 696.

of mysticism, expressing the consciousness of the welling-up in the soul of first-hand experience of the presence and power of God, was strong in the Reformation, as it was in primitive Christianity; but it had been well-nigh lost, in a desert of scholasticism, by the Puritan divines of the seventeenth century. It was not wonderful, therefore, that the early Quakers regarded it as a new revelation to themselves, or rather a recovery of the essential revelation which genuine Christianity is.

Two things, however, marked them off from the early Reformers. In the first place, they were prepared to *trust* this immediate revelation, wrought by Christ Himself in the soul, further than Luther and his contemporaries had ever dreamed of trusting it. George Fox was prepared to rest upon it his whole Church polity. A mediating priesthood he, of course, rejected; but he threw overboard with it the whole function of a trained and separated ministry. This revolutionised public worship; but the revolution, Fox claimed, was simply a reversion to the practice of the primitive Church at Corinth. The "Children of the Light," who gathered around him, began their meetings with silent waiting upon God, giving freedom for such vocal exercises of prayer or praise, testimony or exhortation, as His living Spirit might call forth from any true worshipper, man or woman. This practice has continued in the Society of Friends for 250 years,

and is probably the most distinctive feature of their life. There is no sign at present, in this country at least, of any desire to abandon it. It naturally aroused fierce opposition from those who could not believe that such a method of worship could possibly tend to order or edification, and especially from the less worthy preachers who were threatened, if the new teaching spread, with the loss of influence and even of the means of living.

All special forms of worship being needless, it was natural that the so-called Sacraments were abandoned with the rest. The Quakers could never believe that their Master, Jesus Christ, with whom the Spirit was everything, and who taught that man is not defiled (and therefore not cleansed) by anything of an outward nature, would ever have established binding ceremonies as an essential part of His religion. The passages in which tradition asserted that He had done so, they explained away ; and these are, remarkably enough, among the first that modern historical criticism has rendered of doubtful authenticity. But their rejection of Sacraments was not a mere negation ; it was because they felt themselves baptized with the Holy Spirit and cleansed with the water of life, and because they had entered into the true communion of the death of Christ, that they felt the outward forms to be a needless encumbrance.

The second point in which they went far beyond

the early Reformers was in their constant and uniform declaration that the Light and revelation of the Spirit was not the privilege of the few, but was granted in some degree to every child of man. This it was, more than anything else, that brought down upon them the wrath of the orthodox, not alone the dry traditionalists, but men of saintly life like Bunyan and Baxter. These could not conceive how any who claimed that the Spirit of God was in all men had a right to the name Evangelical, or even Christian. It is worth some study, therefore, to ascertain how such a belief was reconciled with the deep and genuine Evangelical experience that the Quakers undoubtedly possessed; but first it may be well to make good the assertion that this is what they really taught and meant, and also to examine what fruits it brought forth in their lives.

William Penn says of Fox :—

"In his testimony or ministry, he much laboured to open truth to the people's understandings, and to bottom them upon the principle and principal, Christ Jesus, the Light of the world, that by bringing them to something of God in themselves, they might the better know and judge of Him and themselves."[1]

Fox says himself :—

"Now the Lord opened to me by His invisible power, that every man was enlightened by the

[1] Preface to George Fox's *Journal*, p. xlvii.

divine light of Christ; and I saw it shine through all; and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation into the light of life, and became the children of it; but they that hated it, and did not believe in it, were condemned by it, though they made a profession of Christ." [1]

And Robert Barclay sums up the whole of the early Quaker preaching in these words :—

"Glory to God for ever! who hath chosen us as first-fruits to Himself in this day, wherein He is arisen to plead with the nations; and therefore hath sent us forth to preach His everlasting Gospel unto all, Christ nigh to all, the light in all, the seed sown in the hearts of all, that men may come and apply their minds to it." [2]

A typical example of Fox's teaching is the story in his *Journal* of his visit to Carolina, where a "doctor" disputed with him as to the light that is in every man, asserting that it was not in the Indians. Fox thereupon called an Indian, and asked whether or not, when he lied, or did wrong to any one, there was not something in him that reproved him for it? To which the Indian replied that "there was such a thing in him that did so reprove him; and he was ashamed when he had done wrong or spoken wrong." "And so," adds Fox, "we shamed the doctor before the governor and the people." [3]

It will be seen that Fox here adduces the "natural

[1] *Journal*, vol. i. p. 34.
[2] *Apology*, Prop. vi., section 24.
[3] *Journal*, vol. ii. p. 185.

conscience" of man as evidence that there is something of God in him—a "light," as he would call it, or, to use another favourite expression, a Divine "seed." For a reason which I will explain presently, he and his friends declined to *identify* the "natural conscience" with the "seed of God"; but they constantly appealed to it as witnessing to the truth of their contention.

This belief in the universality of the "saving Light" (as Barclay calls it) in the human soul being, then, a fundamental part of their message, we have next to investigate the fruit which it bore in their lives and conduct. Did it make them selfishly indifferent to the spiritual needs of others, engendering in them the comforting delusion that God was doing all that was necessary, and that therefore they need do nothing? On the contrary, none in their day, it may safely be said, were more fervent missionaries than they. Fox might truly have used of himself the words of the great Apostle of the Gentiles: "In labours more abundantly, in prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths oft; in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in labour and travail, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." And he gathered about him, largely from the fells of Westmorland, a band of young preachers who went over the length and breadth of these islands calling men to recognise and obey their inward Teacher.

And more than that, some of them heard and obeyed the call to carry the same message to the far-off colonies, to Indian savages, to Jews and Turks and pagans. Some of these Quaker missionaries were frail women, who faced without flinching the terrors of the pirate-infested ocean, to tell Jews and Moslems that the Christ they did not recognise was near them, and to bid them hearken to His voice.

Was the missionary impulse thus strong within them *in defiance* of their conviction that the Light was in every man? On the contrary, it was just this conviction that gave it force and hope and radiant confidence. For they knew that, wherever they went, the Spirit of God had gone before them, and would witness in the hearts of their hearers that what they said was true. They knew that they had something to appeal to, even in the souls of the most apparently degraded, and they did not appeal in vain.

Moreover, it was this conviction of the "seed of God" in all men that made them pioneers of social justice between man and man. They could not bear to see the Divine image in the human soul defaced and degraded by "the wrong of man to man." As Whittier wrote of Joseph Sturge—

> "He in the vilest saw
> Some sacred crypt or altar of a temple
> Still vocal with God's law."

It was no accident that associated "philanthropy" with their creed. Very early in his ministry, Fox

tells us, he went to the justices at Mansfield, who were met, in accordance with the "Statute of Apprentices," to fix the rate of wages in their district, pleading with them "not to oppress the servants in their wages, but to do that which was right and just to them." [1] "I was sorely exercised," he says, "in going to their courts to cry for justice, and in speaking and writing to judges and justices to do justly; in warning such as kept public-houses for entertainment, that they should not let people have more drink than would do them good. . . . In fairs, also, and in markets, I was made to declare against their deceitful merchandise, cheating, and cozening; warning all to do justly, to speak the truth, to let their yea be yea, and their nay be nay; and to do unto others as they would have others do unto them." [2] In Cornwall he publicly protested against the inhuman practice of "wrecking"; [3] and, in the West Indies, he pleaded with the slave-owners to use their blacks with tenderness, to train them up in the fear of God, and after some years of servitude to set them free.[4] He does not seem to have perceived that slavery was necessarily wrong in itself; but his companion in the island of Barbadoes, William Edmundson, did take that position, and was promptly arrested by the Governor on the charge of inciting the negroes to rebellion. Earlier than that Fox "was moved to write to the

[1] *Journal*, vol. i. p. 27.
[2] *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 39.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 458–461.
[4] *Ibid.*, vol. ii. p. 149.

justices concerning their putting men to death for cattle, and money, and small matters"; and he "laid before the judges what a hurtful thing it was that prisoners should lie so long in jail; showing how they learned wickedness one of another in talking of their bad deeds."[1]

It was the same sense of the worth of mankind, and of the all-inclusiveness of the law of love, that led to the protest against War which his followers have always maintained. This protest was not the outcome merely of a literal interpretation of passages in the Sermon on the Mount. In 1651, just before the battle of Worcester, some people offered to make George Fox a captain in the parliamentary army. "But," he says, "I told them I knew from whence all wars arose, even from the lust, according to James's doctrine; and that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars."[2] He saw that the true defences of a nation are not material but moral—that they are to be found in justice and love, in freedom and contentment, in right dealing between man and man. Moreover, it was felt that military discipline, which necessarily requires unconditional obedience to human authority, may come into inevitable conflict with the only unconditional obedience a human soul ought to render—to the authority of the Christ within.

[1] *Journal*, vol. i. pp. 70, 71.

[2] *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 68.

Such, then, were the moral fruits of the belief of the Quakers in the universality of the Divine Light in the soul of man. Against this affirmation the very obvious objection was raised at once, as it has been often since their day: "If the Spirit of God is in all men, what need is there of Revelation or Redemption; of the Bible, or of the saving work of Jesus Christ on earth? What place is left for the Evangelical experience of conversion and of justification by faith alone?" Their answer was not always clear; but it may be noted at once that they always drew a very sharp distinction between *having* the Light of Christ and *living* in it in sincere obedience. The learned Samuel Fisher, in his prodigious Apologia *Rusticus ad Academicos,* thus expresses it:—

"How often shall we need to tell you, ye blind and deaf, that to have the Light shining in one is one thing; to be in it, in a state of light, and the children of it, is another? To have the Gospel preached in men is one thing; for men to learn the mystery of it is another."

The Quakers met the challenge with the Johannine thought that while Christ was indeed the Light that lighteth every man, yet it is only he that "doeth the truth," that "cometh to the Light, that his works may be made manifest that they have been wrought in God" (John iii. 21). While all are "taught of God," it is only he "that hath heard from the Father and hath learned" who

"cometh unto Me" (John vi. 45). They never denied or undervalued the outward work of Christ; but they strenuously maintained that salvation was not to be known by mere intellectual acceptance either of the facts or of the doctrines based upon them, but by opening the soul to the inward work of cleansing and renewal. "Concerning the Person of Christ," Isaac Penington wrote, in rebutting the charges of heresy on which four Quakers (including a woman) had been put to death on Boston Common :—

"They (the Quakers) believe that Christ is the eternal light, life, wisdom, and power of God, which was manifested in that body of flesh which he took of the virgin; that he is the king, priest, and prophet of his people, and saveth them from their sins by laying down his life for them and imputing his righteousness to them; yet not without revealing and bringing forth the same righteousness *in* them which he wrought *for* them. And by experience they know that there is no being saved by a belief of his death for them, and of his resurrection, ascension, intercession, etc., without being brought into true fellowship with him in his death, and without feeling his immortal seed of life raised and living in them. And so they disown the faith in Christ's death which is only received and entertained from the relation of the letter of the Scriptures, and stands not in the divine power, and sensible experience, of the begotten of God in the heart." [1]

This passage is quite typical of the position taken by the early Quakers. They accepted with entire

[1] Isaac Penington's *Works*, vol. i. p. 360.

sincerity and simplicity the great assertion that "the Word became flesh," and found no more difficulty than did the fourth Evangelist in identifying the eternal Christ of experience with the Jesus of history. In that radiant personality they recognised, if I may so express it, that the diffused light which had always visited the souls of men had been focused in one clear beam; and so they never hesitated to speak of the "Christ" in all men. This I believe to be the secret of their union of breadth and universality of outlook with fundamental Christian orthodoxy, of mysticism with evangelicalism—a union which is nowhere more conspicuous than in the writings of Paul and John, the inner spirit of which they seem to have recovered, not from the study of either the mystics or the early reformers, but through the intense personal experience of their leader Fox.

And yet it would, in my view, be too much to claim that they succeeded in fully and completely reconciling the mystical and the evangelical positions. Like most of the Christian mystics, they believed themselves to be in line with historical and orthodox Christianity; but, if we ask where exactly did they find the ultimate seat of authority, we shall discover that they speak with two voices. In the early days they unhesitatingly asserted that it was within and not without, in the Christian consciousness and not in church or book. And yet, when their position was attacked by the orthodox,

and when they were compelled to defend it, they fell back upon the assumption that the Light within, if followed faithfully, would inevitably lead to the acceptance of the traditional doctrines of Christianity, including the virtual infallibility of the Scriptures. Witness George Fox's celebrated letter to the Governor of Barbadoes.[1] What I am convinced they were feeling after was a conception of authority which finds its seat in the continuous and corporate illumination of the Christian consciousness; but this conception they were never able to grasp securely. Robert Barclay probed the question more deeply than any one else; but even he concludes his examination with the unsatisfying declaration that the spirit is the primary "rule" of faith and practice. If we ask how the "rule" is to be applied, to determine particular questions as they arise, the only logical answer would seem to be, by our own inward and therefore private and individual illumination, which makes each one, so far as he follows the Spirit, an infallible oracle of Divine truth. This position Penington avowedly held. "Every way of it (the Light)," he says, "is infallible, and every step of the creature after it is infallible."[2] Barclay is more cautious, and he keeps in mind the doings of the Anabaptists of Munster, who professed this infallible illumination. But, when he is pressed

[1] *Journal*, vol. ii. p. 155.

[2] *Works*, vol. ii. p. 8; also vol. iii. p. 194: "Mine eye never mis-saw in it," etc.

to answer what is to decide when Christians who profess infallible guidance disagree, he can only answer, "The Scriptures." He writes :—

"Moreover, because they (the Scriptures) are commonly acknowledged by all to have been written by the dictates of the Holy Spirit, and that the errors which may be supposed by the injury of time to have slipped in, are not such but that there is sufficient clear testimony left to all the essentials of the Christian faith ; we do look upon them as the only fit outward judge of controversies among Christians ; and that whatsoever doctrine is contrary unto their testimony may therefore justly be regarded as false." [1]

Now, if we try to follow up to its source this dual position—the confusion of thought common to Barclay and to many of the early Reformers, by which they made the Spirit the witness to Scripture, and Scripture the judge between differing findings of the Spirit—we shall see that it arose in a dualism in the thought of the seventeenth century, which the Quakers, with all the light that undoubtedly came to them, never succeeded in transcending.

Seventeenth-century thought, with the possible exception of the Cambridge Platonists, moved in an atmosphere of dualism. The "natural" world was sharply divided from the "spiritual," the human from the Divine. The world of experience was separated into these water-tight compartments of thought, and its contents never intermingled.

[1] *Apology*, Prop. iii. section 6.

Moreover, for the Quakers no less than for their more orthodox opponents, the world of "nature" and of human life had been wholly ruined by the Fall of Man. Man himself was totally depraved, incapable in himself of a right thought or any effort after God. He moved in an undivine natural world, which the Divine and spiritual might shine upon and save, but from which it was wholly separated. The conception of the Divine immanence, which is so strong in some of the Greek Fathers, Puritanism seems to have wholly lost. The Quakers had recovered the Divine immanence, but they tried vainly to express it in the terms of dualism.

It was by means of such a framework of thought that the early Quakers endeavoured to account for the inward experience that for them had made all things new. The Light they had rediscovered they must make wholly human and natural, or else wholly Divine and spiritual. The former alternative landed them in the conclusion that man needed no saving grace of God; and from this they recoiled with horror. They found themselves, therefore, shut up in the other alternative;[1] and it is to this fact, I believe, more than to any other cause, that their subsequent failure and declension as a people must be traced.

[1] This is why they refused to identify the Light of the Spirit with the "natural" conscience of man; but they never clearly explained the relation between the two.

The logic of their position undoubtedly was that, the Light within them being wholly Divine and non-human, each individual, so far as he followed it, became an infallible oracle of truth, just such as they imagined the writers of the Scriptures to have been. And, further, the power that they felt working in them being regarded as wholly transcendental and supernatural, it followed that it was only as "the creature" and all his works were laid in the dust that it could have free play in their lives. Isaac Penington pathetically writes to his wife to tell her how their little son came into his bed one morning early, and how fearful he was lest his delight in the child's sweet innocent playfulness should ensnare him in "natural" affections. The ascetic impulse, which a dualistic theory has usually aroused in the minds of those who take religion seriously, tended in the Quakers, as it has often done in other mystics, to æsthetic and intellectual poverty. They became afraid to use their minds, at least in relation to the things of the Spirit, because the mind for them was natural and not Divine.

It is, I am convinced, to this source, rather than to any inherent mistake in the system itself, that we must trace the large measure of failure that attended their experiment of a free and wholly non-professional ministry. In Divine worship the ideal came to be that men and women must *cease to think*, in order that their souls might be like "a blank sheet of paper" on which the Spirit

might write His Divine oracles. As I have said elsewhere :[1]—

"This brought forward, in public ministry, persons of a certain psychical temperament, whose sub-conscious life, lying near the surface, was readily brought into play ; and it kept in the background those who, little subject to these mysterious movements, were more accustomed to the conscious use of their minds. Hence the ministry tended to become rhapsodical ; and, while it not infrequently searched in a wonderful manner the hidden depths of the hearers' hearts, it appealed but little to their minds."

The lamentable shrinkage of the Society of Friends from the opening of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth is due, in my judgment, not to any inherent weakness in its method of free, or lay, ministry, or its disuse of outward forms in worship, but mainly to its almost entire failure to recognise the necessity of religious teaching. The idea came to prevail that all the teaching that was required would be supernaturally supplied, and no adequate steps were taken to make provision for it. George Fox's "opening," or intuition, "that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ"[2] was so interpreted as virtually to put a premium on human ignorance ; and no means were provided for securing a succession of the able leaders who did so much to spread the new "way

[1] *Authority and the Light Within*, p. 85. [2] *Journal*, vol. i. p. 7.

of life" in the seventeenth century. Hence the worship of the Friends failed to satisfy and build up the more active spirits among their own members, and still more to draw in seekers after God from the world around.

The fact that, in spite of these weaknesses, the Society of Friends has survived for two hundred and fifty years, and has not only produced a type of character which the world could ill spare, but has done something to leaven humanity with a higher spirit of truthfulness and brotherhood and respect for freedom of conscience, is to my own mind a very powerful evidence of the depth and reality of their Evangelical experience, and of the worth of their witness to the inward and spiritual nature of true Christianity. It is surely not too much to hope that, when we clearly discern the causes of our weakness, and recognise that the great experiment of a purely lay ministry can only succeed when there is impressed upon all our members the need, not alone for a deep personal experience, but for sound knowledge of the Bible and religious history—and when the means are provided by which this knowledge can be acquired, that a supply of instructed leaders may be forthcoming—we may yet have a living message for the world, and offer some real help in establishing the Church of the future,—a Church which, as has been well said, will be "not an institution but a fellowship."

There are, happily, many signs among us of new life, particularly among our younger members. While many religious bodies are lamenting a decline in membership, the Society of Friends in Great Britain has experienced for some four decades a slow but steady increase, which shows no sign at present of giving way. The notable Adult School movement, which was begun by Friends and is still largely under their influence and guided by their ideals, is making an important contribution to Christian democracy, and is bringing social classes together in mutual instruction in Christian principles and their application. The need for religious instruction among our own membership has been largely recognised, and is being met by the establishment of settlements at Woodbrooke and elsewhere, by frequent summer schools for religious and social study, and by different organisations which provide local lectures and encourage the promotion of study circles. And one of the most hopeful features of the present time is a great awakening among our younger members to the meaning and value of the heritage that has come to them as Friends, and to the responsibility it lays upon them to understand better what their Society stands for, and to make known its message to the world. At the same time the work of foreign missions has been taken up with vigour, and our Foreign Mission Association is supporting in five fields of service about one hundred missionaries—

a larger proportion to the total membership, I believe, than is shown by any other religious body in this country, unless it be the Moravians.

I mention these facts, not with any sense of satisfaction, but to remove, if possible, the idea, which is often met with, that the Society of Friends is on the point of extinction and has finished its work for the world. That work may, perhaps, be described as its witness that the power of the deepest Evangelical experience, whether in the individual consciousness or in the fellowship which constitutes the Church, may be known in its full vitality with the simplest of all possible organisations—without a formal creed, without set forms of worship, without any outward sacraments, without even a separated ministry. The Society of Friends has proved that wherever even two or three genuine disciples of Christ can get together—in a private drawing-room, in a log-cabin in the backwoods, far away from the ordinary "means of grace"—there a true Church can be formed, as in the earliest days of Christianity, and genuine Christian worship be carried on, to the deepening and enriching of the worshippers' own lives and the help of those around them, without waiting for any ordained minister to come and conduct their "service."

The fact that such simple worship can be conducted in real life and power, in order and to edification, producing practical fruits of righteousness

and public service in the lives of those who are inspired by it, is surely no useless testimony to the reality of the presence of God in the world, to the actual guidance of the living Spirit of Christ our Lord.

At the last meeting of the Church Congress, at Cambridge, Dr. Gore, then Bishop of Birmingham, made a noteworthy admission. "He did not see," he said, "the manifold fruits of the Spirit more markedly than among the Quakers, who had neither orders nor sacraments." Without assuming that we deserve such a tribute, the fact that it could be offered by an Anglican bishop is, perhaps, the best evidence that our "witness to Evangelical Christianity" has not been altogether in vain.

THE METHODIST CHURCHES

BY

A. S. PEAKE, D.D.

Methodism largely a reflection of John Wesley's experience and character—The conditions in England at the time of the Methodist revival—The antecedents of Wesley's conversion—The nature of that experience—The change in emphasis which it involved—The subordination of everything to the work of rescuing the lost—The advance of Methodism—Secessions and other movements—Statistics of Methodism at the present day—Wesley's theology—His acceptance of the great Catholic doctrines—Universal depravity—Universal redemption—The Methodist hymns the best expression of the typical Methodist experience—Conversion as a crisis—The doctrine of Assurance—The sense of ecstasy—The prudential element in the appeal to the unconverted — The stress on future punishment — Abnormal physical and psychical manifestations — Methodism as an emotional religion—Entire sanctification —The organisation—Methodism forced into separation from the Anglican Church by the logic of the situation—The class meeting—Value of the training in extempore speech—Methodism non-legalist and non-sacramentarian, Catholic and evangelical—Sketch of its leading characteristics.

THE METHODIST CHURCHES [1]

In any attempt to interpret the genius of Methodism a very prominent place must be accorded to the character and experience of its founder. The impress of his personality is indelibly stamped upon it. His experience has been typical for it, his strength and his weakness, his breadth and his limitations are reflected in it. Methodism has, indeed, been moulded by many another influence—the pressure of circumstances, the spiritual and intellectual atmosphere, the need of continuous adjustment to changing conditions and new demands. But through a great part of its history

[1] This is not the lecture actually delivered, but a substitute for it. I was not aware of the intention to publish, and therefore had not written. The lecture as printed includes substantially, I believe, most of what I said, but as an extempore address is naturally more diffuse than a written, I have been able to pack my matter in a tighter space and add a good deal that time did not permit me to include. I owe special thanks to my esteemed friend Dr. Simon, the Governor of Didsbury College, for his kindness in reading the manuscript and out of his wealth of expert knowledge making some most helpful criticisms and suggestions. I have given effect to these, but he must not be held responsible either for the views put forward or the way in which they are expressed. But though he would have put some things differently, I think he would be in cordial sympathy with the main lines of my presentation.

it has not been distinguished for its mobility. It has prized loyalty to itself more than swift reaction to its environment. Recent years have, I think, seen a marked change in this respect. But through a long period of its career it remained predominantly self-centred in its interests, believing that thus it could best fulfil the great mission entrusted to it. To build on the foundation already laid; jealously to scrutinise any departure from its tradition; to warn sinners with urgency to flee from the wrath to come; to train its members into conformity with its characteristic religious experience and moral code—seemed the work supremely worth doing, for the neglect of which no width of outlook or expansion of activity could atone. I do not, therefore, apologise for giving so large a space to John Wesley in this brief attempt to describe the genius of Methodism. It is in his character and career that we are to find the answer to the questions, why the activities of Methodism ran in this channel rather than in that, why in its teaching the emphasis was placed where it was, and doctrines assumed their relative proportion, and why the experience which it has created and anxiously cultured has been so largely of one type.

I need not tell over again the well-known story of England's lapse into barbarism and brutality, into drunkenness and vice, into ignorance and irreligion. The upper classes of society were, for

the most part, frivolous, cynical, and abandoned, without reverence for God or sense of responsibility towards their fellows. For them Christianity was a superstition, its truth disproved so conclusively, so finally, that dispute about it was no longer needed. The lower classes, neglected by those who were charged with concern for their welfare, offered an appalling spectacle of physical destitution and moral degradation. They were not more vicious than their social superiors, and their vices had far more excuse, since they did not flout the restraints of morality, but were rather ignorant of their existence. The social conditions aggravated the evil. The dull stagnation of their life, the discomforts and privations against which they had to struggle, the brutality of the penal code, the utter lack of educational system and intellectual interest, all conspired to make their condition one in which the higher aspirations had but little chance. Sodden and stupid, brutal in their pleasures, and bestial in their vice, they were as sheep having no shepherd. Lethargy and indifference had overtaken the Churches in large measure; religion had become formal and mechanical; the heart-rending condition of the people was taken for granted, and no efforts were organised for its amelioration. Of course this description must be taken with qualification. There were exceptions, but, broadly speaking, the impression conveyed is correct.

Such an exception was to be found in the Epworth Rectory, where John and Charles Wesley were born. Though of Puritan ancestors, their parents were loyal and devoted members of the Church of England. Their affinities were with the Laudian school, a circumstance which had an important bearing on the later development of Wesley's theology. John Wesley's mother was a woman of exceptional strength of character, and the indirect debt which Methodism owed her it would not be easy to estimate. An austere moral training, an exacting piety, an unquestioned orthodoxy were the heritage which the Wesleys received from parents who had little else to give. I must not linger on the founding of the Holy Club at Oxford; the severity of its mortifications; the zeal with which it ministered to the distressed, and especially to the prisoners in the gaol, above all, to those who were under sentence of death. Nor yet must I dwell on John Wesley's visit to America, whither he went to convert the Indians. He was at this time a dedicated spirit, serving God and his fellows with an exacting fidelity which gave him no rest. Politically a High Churchman, stiff in the maintenance of ministerial prerogative, a believer in apostolic succession, pressing the duty of confession to the minister, repelling from the communion those in whose Christian conduct he could find no flaw, but whose ecclesiastical status was irregular in his eyes, narrow and intolerant

to those outside his own fold, ascetic in theory and in practice, he had affinities with the Tractarians of a later day. But he repudiated the doctrine of Transubstantiation. His contact with the Moravians proved the turning-point of his life. He realised that religion had brought to them an inward peace and confidence which it had not brought to him. When pressed as to his possession of the inward witness, he had no answer to give. He came to feel that he who had gone to America to convert the Indians was not converted himself.

The crisis came on 24th May 1738. The classical passage in which Wesley tells the story of his evangelical conversion has been quoted many times, but it is necessary for me to quote it once more. "In the evening I went very unwillingly to a Society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death." His brother Charles had passed through the same experience three days before. To John Wesley this experience seemed at the time to be a real passing from death to life. When he looked back

upon it in riper years he still recognised the critical character of the experience, but drew much less sharply the distinction between the religious condition it inaugurated and that which had preceded it. Instead of denying that he possessed faith at all, he described his faith as that of a servant, not of a son. And in the review of his life, which in his journal immediately precedes the account of his conversion, he brings out very strongly this servile condition. He was under the Law, striving to live in the fullest conformity with it, but trusting to his own works and his own righteousness, and without the witness of the Spirit. Even when he was strongly convinced that a true, living faith was the one thing needful, he did not fix it on its right object: "I meant only faith in God, not faith in or through Christ." He fought strenuously against Peter Böhler's affirmation with reference to true faith in Christ that it was inseparably accompanied by "dominion over sin and constant peace from a sense of forgiveness." He required that it should be attested by Scripture and experience. His investigation of the former brought him to the conclusion that the plain sense of the Bible made against his opinion, but since he did not believe that experience would accord with the literal interpretation of the passages, he refused to accept it till he found some living witnesses of it. These were produced, and all testified "that a true living faith in Christ

is inseparable from a sense of pardon for all past and freedom from all present sins. They added with one mouth that this faith was the gift, the free gift of God; and that He would surely bestow it upon every soul who earnestly and perseveringly sought it." He was at last convinced, and resolved to seek this faith by absolutely renouncing all dependence on his own works or righteousness, "on which," he says, "I had really grounded my hope of salvation, though I knew it not, from my youth up," and by prayer for justifying, saving faith. The experience through which Wesley thus passed was closely parallel to that of Luther and essentially to that of Paul. It was the transition from the bondage of an anxious legalism to an evangelical faith and the freedom of the children of God. It meant for him that the emphasis was shifted from baptism to conversion, from works to faith. He felt that a man might have lived the life he had lived, of intense, unsparing devotion to God and service to his fellows, and yet be an unconverted man. His standing with God he came to see rested wholly on the merit of Christ, his own merit and works counting for nothing. Of momentous importance, too, was the assurance of pardon which was the outcome of his trust.

We must now consider how Methodism grew out of this experience. Of course John Wesley brought with him from his earlier stage a large Anglican heritage. He always believed his own

theological opinions to be in harmony with the Articles of the Church of England; but there was much that remained unchanged by the crisis through which he passed,—the great fundamental Articles of the Creed; an Arminian as opposed to a Calvinistic conception of the universality of redemption; a vivid conviction of the imperious demands of conscience; a love of order, propriety, and conventionality; a sense of the rights and prerogatives of the clergy. But the new point of view changed the emphasis in some respects, while the course of events and the leading of Providence forced him gradually to abandon much that he at first strenuously maintained. What he saw with appalling clearness of vision and intensity of compassion was the imminent peril, in which multitudes stood, of eternal banishment from God to hopeless, unimaginable torment. His evangelistic passion swept away his most obstinate prejudices. If men could be saved by regular means so much the better; if not, then by irregular rather than not saved at all; saved they must be at any cost. When parish churches were closed to him he had to take to the fields or the streets; and if but few of the clergy would preach the necessity of conversion, or offer the "full, free, and present salvation, attainable now," which was the characteristic Methodist message, then the duty must be entrusted to laymen. His consecration was unreserved, he sacrificed his cherished prejudices, crucified his

natural preferences,[1] would not swerve a hair's-breadth from the work of the ministry even to vindicate his own honour and reputation when it was venomously assailed.[2] He was indeed almost inhuman in his concentration on his mission.[3] He had an astonishing capacity for work; he had reduced the economy of time to a fine art; he had a remarkable gift of endurance, an imperious will, a genius for organisation which has rarely been

[1] "What marvel the devil does not love field preaching! Neither do I. I love a commodious room, a soft cushion, and a handsome pulpit. But where is my zeal, if I do not trample all these under foot, in order to save one more soul!"—Tyerman's *Life and Times of John Wesley*, vol. ii. p. 329.

[2] His wife, whose character is too well known to need description, sent some letters of Wesley, which she had infamously interpolated, to a newspaper. Charles Wesley in consternation begged his brother to postpone a journey and remain in London to defend himself. His daughter gives the following account of the interview: "I shall never forget the manner in which my father accosted my mother on his return home. 'My brother,' said he, 'is indeed an extraordinary man. I placed before him the importance of the character of a minister; and the evil consequences which might result from his indifference to it; and urged him, by every relative and public motive, to answer for himself, and stop the publication. His reply was, "*Brother, when I devoted to God my ease, my time, my life, did I except my reputation? No. Tell Sally I will take her to Canterbury to-morrow.*"' "—Tyerman, *loc. cit.* vol. iii. pp. 233 f.

[3] In March 1751, a fortnight after his marriage, he left his wife for the Conference at Bristol. He returned after three weeks' absence, and left London in six days' time. His entry in his journal is as follows: "I cannot understand how a Methodist preacher can answer it to God, to preach one sermon, to travel one day less, in a married than in a single state. In this respect surely, 'it remaineth, that they who have wives be as though they had none.'" But the austerity of Wesley has been much exaggerated. See Rigg, *The Living Wesley*, part iv. chap. ii., and *A New History of Methodism*, vol. i. pp. 204–207.

surpassed. His life was prolonged to an extreme old age, and he was active till the last. It is not wonderful in view of all these circumstances that he achieved so much. Yet it was not his work alone which changed the face of England. The incomparable oratory of Whitefield, whose zeal burned with the same apostolic glow ; the preaching, and, far more, the hymns of Charles Wesley ; the unsparing labours of the Methodist preachers ; the devoted lives of the Methodist people, multitudes of whom were a testimony to the miraculous power of the Gospel, which none who had known them in their earlier blindness could gainsay ; co-operated with the labours of the founder to achieve the grand result.

The success won by the movement in Wesley's lifetime was phenomenal. When he died in 1791 the number of members in the society in Great Britain was 72,000, the adherents were estimated to be nearly half a million. Taking America with Great Britain the membership stood at 136,000, the adherents were calculated at more than 800,000. Since that period the advance has been very remarkable. Of course it has been checked by various influences, especially the disastrous disputes on ecclesiastical questions, which led to the secessions out of which came the Methodist New Connexion and the United Methodist Free Church. We have also always to reckon in religious movements with the loss of the early enthusiasm and

the settling down into conditions in which respectability tends to suppress the unconventional expression of religious experience or evangelistic fervour. Movements which begin in an irregular way and set precedents at defiance create ere long precedents of their own, lose their elasticity, and stiffen into an ecclesiasticism which looks askance at departure from its rigid routine. The movements which gave rise to the Primitive Methodist and the Bible Christian Churches were irregular in character and were therefore disowned by the Wesleyan Conference. Both sides had a real case, and, as we can see looking back calmly, while the leaders of the movements were conscious of a Divine call which they dared not disobey, the ecclesiastical authorities were not unreasonably apprehensive lest the movements should be attended with grave moral peril. They were, however, overruled for good, and very friendly feelings have characterised almost throughout the relations between the older and the younger bodies, neither of which, strictly speaking, had originated in a schism. And in the case of the secessions time has healed the soreness which controversy created. A very happy indication of the brotherly feeling which now prevails was given by the first Methodist Assembly recently held, in which all the sections of British Methodism met together for mutual instruction and encouragement. Recently three Methodist communities, the Methodist New Con-

nexion, the Bible Christians, and the United Methodist Free Church, joined to form the United Methodist Church. A comparatively new country like America has naturally offered much more scope for expansion than Great Britain, and in the United States the total membership in 1908 amounted to more than six and a half millions. In Canada the membership was over 320,000, in Australasia over 150,000. The total membership of world-wide Methodism in that year is given as 8,655,267. The number of scholars in the Sunday Schools is given as 7,058,635. It must be remembered, in estimating the significance of these figures, that a very large number of worshippers and adherents in Methodist Churches, including multitudes of children, are not enrolled as members. To ascertain the total number of members and adherents the number of members should be multiplied at least by three. We should probably be safe in estimating that there are twenty-five million Methodists in the world. Some would fix the number at about thirty millions.[1] Only parochial insularity could affect to ignore, in its dreams of a reunited Christendom, a force so vast. Equally

[1] A table of statistics of Methodism in 1908 is given by Mr. Eayrs in *A New History of Methodism* (1909). It is very difficult to apply any general principle in calculating, on a basis of membership, the number of adherents, inasmuch as conditions vary widely. Dr. Simon gives a cautious estimate in his *Fernley Lecture* (p. 274). "We think that it is no exaggeration to say that, at the present time, there are upwards of twenty-five millions of persons in the world who may be considered as Methodists."

impressive are the statistics of Church property. The churches in Great Britain and Ireland, together with the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Methodist Episcopal South, and the Canadian Methodist Church, hold property which has cost more than eighty-four million pounds.

From this bare statement of statistics I pass on to speak of Wesley's attitude to Theology. This was largely determined by practical considerations. Those doctrines which were essential to his message of salvation were naturally those on which most emphasis was placed. His intellect was of the clear and logical order, his style of presentation argumentative. There was a critical and even a sceptical vein in his nature,[1] though he did not exercise this faculty on the truths of revelation, which he accepted with implicit confidence,[2] and to which his own preconceived opinions were forced to give way. His resolve to test the Moravian conception of saving faith by Scripture and experience was characteristic of his later

[1] This is brought out very well by Dr. Rigg in *The Living Wesley*, pp. 184–191. He quotes a passage from Wesley's sermon on *The Good Steward*, from which I take the following sentences: "After having sought the truth with some diligence for half a century, I am, at this day, hardly sure of anything but what I learn from the Bible. Nay, I positively affirm that I know nothing else so certainly that I would dare to stake my salvation upon it."

[2] It is true that he says that he had a thousand times doubted of the divinity of the Scripture after the fullest assurance preceding (Rigg, *l.c.* p. 184). But I think the statement in the text may stand as representing his habitual attitude, which is expressed in the passage quoted in the previous note.

attitude. What the Gospel really was had to be determined by investigation of the word of God, and that interpretation accepted which harmonised with experience. His distaste for the twilight and his love for a logically articulated system of saving truth made the idea of a plan of salvation congenial to him. This plan was something which could be stated in plain and simple words so that the least educated might understand it, and granting its premises it was to commend itself to men of reason by its self-consistency. Nothing could be further from the truth than to imagine that the sermons of Wesley consisted of rhetoric, or sentiment, or appeal to the emotions—he appealed rather to the will through the reason.

He accepted, of course, the great doctrines of the Catholic faith—the doctrine of the Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, original sin, redemption through the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, the Divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit, justification by faith, rewards and punishments. A special stress was laid on the depravity of human nature, even in the best. His emphasis on this aroused a very fierce resentment. Prizing the sacraments though he did, his own experience had driven him to the conviction that they did not suffice for salvation. The radical mischief of human nature was not removed by baptism. Regeneration was the result of a conscious and deliberate turning to God in repentance and faith in Christ. Still less than the

appointed means of grace could a man's own good works save him. All this was directly in the teeth of the conception of Christianity current at the time, which regarded the Church as the ark of salvation to be entered by regeneration in baptism. Wesley did not underestimate the importance of the Church, but salvation was for him an intensely personal matter. Men were saved one by one, not in virtue of their membership in a society. To the Greeks the cross is bound to be foolishness; men of taste have a natural aversion to evangelical religion; while the aristocratically minded feel it most objectionable to be reduced before God to the same level as their humbler fellows. This resentment and disgust come out very clearly in a well-known letter written by the Duchess of Buckingham to the Countess of Huntingdon :—

"I thank your ladyship for the information concerning the Methodist preaching; their doctrines are most repulsive, and strongly tinctured with impertinence and disrespect towards their superiors, in perpetually endeavouring to level all ranks and to do away with all distinctions, as it is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting."

Having once to preach to an aristocratic audience, Wesley took for his text, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" When some one said that such a sermon would have been suitable in Billingsgate, "but it

was highly improper here," Wesley replied that had he been preaching in Billingsgate his text would have been, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."[1] To the baptized as well as to the unbaptized the warning was addressed, "Ye must be born again." And it was addressed to all without the discrimination which accompanies the doctrine of a limited atonement. Wesley's Arminianism was part of his inheritance from the Laudian Anglicanism in which he had been trained. It was an element of incalculable value. Of course it caused the Nonconformists, who were largely Calvinistic, to look for a while askance on the Methodist movement, since they dreaded that unhappy results might follow from this presentation of the gospel, as, indeed, had happened in other cases. It was, therefore, not altogether a misfortune that Whitefield, while preaching essentially the same gospel as Wesley, was himself a Calvinist. It helped to break down the prejudice which the Nonconformists felt against Methodism. The main body of Methodist opinion, however, was decisively Arminian, and it had the future before it. To every man the assurance was offered that Jesus had died for him; that he was caught in the toils of no irreversible decree, which rendered it impossible to accept the gospel invitation; that his will was free to accept or to refuse; and that at any moment he might turn from his

[1] Tyerman, *l.c.* vol. iii. p. 657.

evil way and live. The universality of redemption was affirmed in the Methodist hymns as well as in the sermons; and sometimes the full meaning of the hymns can be grasped only if the implicit antithesis to Calvinism is borne in mind.

"Father, whose everlasting love
Thine only Son for sinners gave,
Whose grace to all did freely move,
And sent Him down the world to save—

Help us Thy mercy to extol,
Immense, unfathomed, unconfined;
To praise the Lamb who died for all,
The general Saviour of mankind.

Thy undistinguishing regard
Was cast on Adam's fallen race;
For all Thou hast in Christ prepared
Sufficient, sovereign, saving grace.

The world He suffered to redeem;
For all He hath the atonement made,
For those that will not come to Him
The ransom of His life was paid."

But this thought of the universality of redemption did not detract from the sense of wonder with which the saved man regarded the miracle of grace that had brought him up out of the horrible pit. Once again the hymns supply us with the best illustrations. While John Wesley's four volumes of sermons and his Notes on the New Testament are the official standards of Methodist doctrine and have left their deep mark on the theology and experience of Methodism, the hymns of Charles Wesley have probably had a deeper, as they have

unquestionably had a far wider influence; and it is to these rather than the more formal statements that it is best where possible to turn when we are in search of the Methodist point of view, and still more when we are seeking to understand the typical Methodist experience. The note of wonder that the grace of God should have stooped to save the chief of sinners is struck in them again and again. An admirable example it is worth our while to quote at length.

"And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should'st die for me!

'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design!
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depth of love Divine.
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

He left His Father's throne above;
So free, so infinite His grace!
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race!
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray:
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ, my own."

"It found out me!" Such was the supreme marvel of the Divine grace. Or we might take as another example the hymn which opens with the line, "Where shall my wondering soul begin?"

It was natural that conversion should normally assume the form of a crisis. There might be prolonged wrestling of spirit, deep agony under the conviction of sin; or the sinner might be stopped in full career, enter, as often happened, the service as a scoffer, a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and leave it with the sense of pardon and peace. But whether in one way or the other, there was normally a sharpness and definiteness about the experience which has caused many Methodists till a comparatively recent period to look with a degree of suspicion on those who could not point to the very time and place where they came to know that their sins were forgiven. Wesley himself, it is true, recognised that the consciousness of acceptance might come "by almost insensible degrees, like the dawning of the day." The doctrine of the witness of the Spirit naturally received a very prominent place in Methodist theology.[1] In Wesley's account

[1] Wesley's definition in his first sermon on *The Witness of the Spirit* is important. It was reiterated twenty years later in the second Discourse. After pointing out the inadequacy of human

of his conversion already quoted, we read: "An assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death." This experience was reproduced in countless other cases, and was, in fact, so normal that at an earlier time the vast majority of Methodists would probably have refused to admit that a man was truly forgiven unless he had the witness to his pardon within himself. It would have been regarded as axiomatic by many that no further proof was needed that a man's sins had not been forgiven than that he should dispute the possibility that one should know on earth his sins forgiven. Since every one whose sins were forgiven must be aware of the fact, whoever disputed the possibility of such knowledge demonstrated that his own sins still remained unpardoned. At a later time Wesley

language to express the experience enjoyed by the children of God, he proceeds: "But perhaps one might say (desiring any who are taught of God to correct, to soften, or strengthen the expression) the testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given Himself for me; and that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God." At a later point he adds: "But the fact we know, namely, that the Spirit of God does give a believer such a testimony of his adoption, that while it is present to the soul, he can no more doubt the reality of his sonship, than he can doubt of the shining of the sun, while he stands in the full blaze of his beams." Recent discussions may be seen in Dr. Workman's Introduction to *A New History of Methodism*, vol. i. pp. 19–31, and in Dr. Tasker's article "Certainty" in Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. iii. Very characteristic expressions of the doctrine may be found in the hymns, "Spirit of faith, come down," and "How can a sinner know His sins on earth forgiven?"

came to see that his doctrine had been altogether too sweeping. Much was still made of the inward witness. It was presented as the privilege of all believers, to be earnestly sought after where it had not been attained at conversion. But, from the standpoint of his maturer experience, having come to recognise that he himself had had a true faith, though it was but the faith of a servant, not of a son, in the period which closed with that memorable night in Aldersgate Street, he came also to see that there were those who did not possess the testimony of the Spirit to their sonship who, nevertheless, were sons of God. On them it was to be well understood that the wrath of God did not abide. In the present day the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit has fallen much into the background. It is probably inevitable that it should be so. Where conversion is usually experienced as a great crisis, which cuts the life into two sharply contrasted periods, it is natural that the sense of change should be far more overwhelming than where there has been no such sudden rupture of continuity. In the third and fourth generation the conditions are completely transformed. Yet it is to be wished that Methodism could recover the sense of certainty, checking, indeed, the personal by the collective experience and proclaiming the doctrine of assurance with a larger charity. It is easy to see what a gain it was to Methodism to be free from the anxious scrupulosity of the legalist

who could never be sure of his standing with God, and from the dread which darkened the life of many a Calvinist, whether in His inscrutable counsel God had selected him for election or reprobation.

The doctrine of assurance naturally called forth the bitterest opposition. It savoured of fanaticism and enthusiasm, than which the eighteenth century knew scarcely anything to be more distrusted and despised. Many felt that it fostered spiritual pride, and that the discipline of uncertainty was needed to save the Christian from unwatchfulness and presumption. The unguarded way in which it was constantly stated laid it open to the obvious objection that experience contradicted it, inasmuch as there were many whose genuine Christianity could not be doubted, who, nevertheless, did not enjoy this experience. Many regarded it much as the Duchess of Buckingham had regarded the doctrine of total depravity. Referring to a man who had been adjudged to banishment or to death, Wesley says: "I asked a little gentleman at St. Just what objection there was to Edward Greenfield. He said, 'Why, the man is well enough in other things; but his impudence the gentlemen cannot bear. Why, sir, he says he knows his sins are forgiven!'" To the criticisms which were urged against his doctrine Wesley replied by an appeal to the Homilies of the Church of England. He was not indifferent to the danger of subjectivity and the possibility of self-delusion, and therefore he

insisted that the witness of the Spirit must be accompanied by the fruits of the Spirit,[1] while by the institution of meetings for fellowship he corrected the individual by the collective experience.

This freedom from uncertainty, this consciousness of deliverance, created a new rapture and unsealed new springs of peace. One does not understand Methodism unless he has realised that it is a religion of joy and exultation. This joy had more than one root: partly it was the rebound from the grief over the past and despair for the future, which was so often the immediate antecedent of conversion; partly it was the unspeakable relief which sprang from the sense of forgiveness and the assurance that the crushing burden of sin had been removed. Deepest of all was the bliss experienced in fellowship with the Redeemer Himself. This, again, is best illustrated by hymns. The first I quote, not forgetful of Matthew Arnold's condemnation, which, from his standpoint, was only to be anticipated. One might, indeed, wish the expression at the close of the second verse to be improved, but I am concerned with the content of the experience itself.

"My God I am Thine,
What a comfort divine,
What a blessing to know that my Jesus is mine!
In the heavenly Lamb
Thrice happy I am,
And my heart it doth dance at the sound of His Name.

[1] "Let none ever presume to rest in any supposed testimony of the Spirit, which is separate from the fruit of it."

True pleasures abound
In the rapturous sound;
And whoever hath found it, hath Paradise found.
My Jesus to know,
And feel His blood flow,
'Tis life everlasting, 'tis heaven below."

To hear this hymn sung to a Corybantic tune by a congregation wholly possessed with the feelings it describes, and to hear it with sympathy and not with disdain, is to gain an insight into an essential element in religion, the lack of which is painfully felt in many who have sought to expound its inmost nature. It is a deeper note which is sounded in another verse.

"Ah! show me that happiest place,
The place of Thy people's abode,
Where saints in an ecstasy gaze,
And hang on a crucified God;
Thy love for a sinner declare,
Thy passion and death on the tree:
My spirit to Calvary bear,
To suffer and triumph with Thee."

John Wesley's strong language about the Mystics[1] must not blind us to the real affinity with some elements in Mysticism which have entered very

[1] Wesley had been deeply influenced by the Mystics in his earlier period, but as early as 1736 he had written an abstract of their doctrines to his brother Samuel (quoted in Tyerman's *Life*, vol. i. pp. 133 f.), from which his judgment, even before his conversion, may be gathered. It must, however, be observed that the Mystics are, for him, those who slight the means of grace. The passage opens: "I think the rock on which I had nearest made shipwreck of the faith was the writings of the Mystics: under which term I comprehend all, and only those, who slight any of the means of grace." (See also vol. iii. p. 341.) Dr. Workman quotes the following vehe-

deeply into the essence of Methodism. His own translations from some of the German hymns give an admirable expression to this aspect of Methodism.

A great urgency was given to the preaching of the Methodists by their conviction of the terrible and hopeless destiny which awaited those who died in their sins. It is easy to criticise the prudential element in their appeals to the unconverted; but it was a profound pity and unselfish love of their fellows that led them to face social ostracism, the penalties of the law, and the ferocity of the mob, if only they could save souls from the torments of hell. At times the expression of the supreme importance attaching to decision is apt to seem repulsive. An example of this is to be found in the following verse—

> "Nothing is worth a thought beneath,
> But how I may escape the death
> That never, never dies—
> How make my own election sure,
> And, when I fail on earth, secure
> A mansion in the skies."

To our self-complacent altruism the naked egoism here so indecently exhibited may perhaps seem

ment sentences, written many years later: "All the other enemies of Christianity are trifles. The Mystics are the most dangerous. They stab it in the vitals, and its most serious professors are most likely to fall by them. . . . The whole of Behmenism, both phrase and sense, is useless, most sublime nonsense, inimitable bombast, fustian not to be paralleled. . . . The mystic writers are one great antichrist" (*A New History of Methodism*, vol. i. p. 54). He brings out clearly, however, the close affinities between Methodism and Mysticism.

contemptible. But the man who wrote these lines was no egoist. He wrote also—

> "O that the world might taste and see
> The riches of His grace!
> The arms of love that compass me
> Would all mankind embrace."

And a little later—

> "'Tis all my business here below
> To cry, 'Behold the Lamb!'"

The ideal expressed in this and in many another hymn was exemplified by the Methodists in general. And if it be replied that the verse criticised was written to inculcate this egoistic attitude in others, that also is to miss the point. The contrast is not between the salvation of self and the salvation of others, but, as is clear from the hymn as a whole, between the attainment of salvation and all the good which earth has to offer. It is Charles Wesley's somewhat extravagant way of putting the old question, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" It was therefore natural that the Methodist preachers should press for immediate decision. Not infrequently the preacher would drive home his appeals by anecdotes, illustrating the danger of delay, or the advantage of a prompt decision, which had reversed the fate of those who had repented just in time. The descriptions of future bliss or woe were very realistic in character, and although the lurid type of sermon has now largely died out, it

is not so long since a fairly large proportion of the Sunday night sermons were of this order. They were based on such texts as: "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" "For the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" But the preachers knew also how to sound the winning note; and it would be unjust to suggest that their appeals to the unconverted were addressed simply to their fears. At the same time it is true that through a long part of its history, while Methodism has been jealous of any deviation from strict orthodoxy, it has been nervously alert to any coquetting with universalism or conditional immortality. The situation is altering even here, and for a long while past the coarse literalism, which characterised the older representation of hell, has been tacitly or explicitly abandoned.

That the preaching of the early Methodist preachers was accompanied by abnormal physical manifestations, which were repeated in connexion with the American camp meetings[1] and the early history of Primitive Methodism, will occasion no surprise to those who are familiar with the history of revivals. It is only within recent years that

[1] The *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*, a Methodist preacher in the backwoods of America, gives a most graphic and racy picture of the life of a "circuit rider," and especially of the camp meetings. No reader will ever forget the phenomena known as "the jerks."

the subject has been attacked in a scientific manner, and the origin and interrelation of the phenomena are still obscure. They are not, indeed, confined to the religion of Israel and Christianity, but parallels are to be found among many peoples and in widely separated religions. The early history of Hebrew prophecy, the spiritual gifts in the Primitive Church from Pentecost onwards, the physical convulsions that attended certain religious movements in the Mediaeval Church, the conditions created by the Welsh Revival, had their counterpart in Methodism. In all cases the law seems to be that the new burst of life is accompanied by these abnormal manifestations, and that as the wild tumult subsides into a more peaceful and even flow they tend gradually to die out. It does not follow that the initial impulse is exhausted or that the enthusiasm and passion have vanished. Sometimes this may be the case, but the later stage ought to retain all the heat of the earlier, even when the leaping flame has sunk to a flicker, and the thronging sparks have ceased to mount on high. But a whole series of phenomena, which in the last generation were indiscriminately labelled as superstition by a thin and impatient materialism, are now being studied with sympathy ; and the early records of the various branches of Methodism are full of rich material for the student of religious psychology. It was quite common for many hearers to be physically struck down to the ground. Several would

lapse into a state of unconsciousness or go into trances. For the latter the expressive term "to go into vision" was sometimes used. Clairvoyance and clairaudience were not unexampled. There were also remarkable cases of prevision and prediction. Abnormal physical strength, such as is familiar in cases of mental pathology, also occurred, as when a weak, crippled woman lifted a heavy stove, which two men could barely lift, and carried it round the village chapel. It is not remarkable that the early Methodists, to whom modern psychology was unknown, should see a plain token of God's working in such things as these. That the meetings were often noisy is only what might have been anticipated. Methodism was simply conforming to type in this as in other respects. This also dies down in the second or third generation ; it is dead in the fourth, and supercilious descendants, in their ignorance of spiritual phenomena, sometimes look back with contempt or disgust on the pit from which they have been digged. The sympathetic student will recognise that this attitude is just as unreasonable as that of those who sigh for a return of the earlier days, who seek the living among the dead, and attempt to galvanise a vanished past into an artificial life.

Since the time when it was a nine days' wonder that so steady a yokel as Saul should have been touched by the Divine fire and be found among the prophets, it has been the eccentricities of

revivalists which have caught the attention of the world. It is not strange that much should have been made by the critics of Methodism of its enthusiastic and emotional character. No one who knew Methodism from the inside could imagine that it was adequately summed up in the phrase "emotional religion." Nor yet, to take another criticism urged from more quarters than one, that it was admirable for bringing in the unconverted, but could do little for them when it had gathered them into its fold. It drilled its converts by a severe moral discipline; it provided them, not only with the exposition of the Word from the pulpit, but with opportunities of spiritual fellowship and mutual edification in its class meetings and band meetings. It laid upon them the duty of witnessing for Christ before the world, and especially, where it was most difficult to do so, among their daily associates. It taught them their responsibility for the souls of their fellows, whom they were, if possible, to pluck as brands from the burning. Yet I am not sure whether Methodists have not sometimes shown themselves too careful to answer the criticism that Methodism is an emotional religion. I, at least, can understand no religion which is not at the core of it emotional. It goes without saying that no religion can be acceptable to us without an intellectual element, that it must capture the will and control the conduct. But unless the deepest springs of feeling

within the being are touched, unless there is the thrill of contact between God and the human soul, no matter how elaborate the ritual, how closely reasoned the theology, how conformable to the strictest morality the conduct, the supreme satisfaction of the religious instinct is lost.[1] The hymns which I have quoted are testimony enough that, whatever the defects of Methodism may be, at least it has known what religion is.

One of the most characteristic of Methodist doctrines still remains to be mentioned. This was the doctrine of entire sanctification. With all the emphasis that Wesley placed on conversion, he did not look on salvation as escape from the consequences of sin. It really consisted in escape from sin itself. But even if it were granted theoretically that sanctification might coincide with justification, Wesley held that as a matter of fact it rarely if ever did so.[2] Hence sanctification was often spoken of as "the second blessing." But, like justification, it must be received by faith and would normally be instantaneous. There was the same predilection here as with conversion for a sharp, clear-cut experience. The essence of Christian perfection was found in perfect love; the supernatural action of God's Spirit, answering the urgent desire and faith of the believer, cleansed

[1] I may refer for a fuller development of this to what I have said in *Christianity: its Nature and its Truth*, chap. i.

[2] See the sermons *On Sin in Believers* and *The Repentance of Believers*.

him instantaneously from all the roots of bitterness and sin which conversion had left in his nature. Whatever criticisms may be urged against the doctrine, and whatever cautions experience may dictate as to its presentation, it is undeniable that the New Testament says much as to the duties and privileges of believers, which a less heroic temper has either ignored or tacitly judged as too idealistic for everyday life. The tendency, as time has gone on, has probably been towards a considerable modification of the doctrine. This tendency has been to some extent checked by "higher life" movements, but the conception of sanctification as a process is probably far more widely held and more congenial than the interpretation of conversion as a process. It is certainly to be wished that the elements of permanent value in the older presentation of the subject should regain prominence in the Methodist message, and that the ethical implicates of the doctrine should be more thoroughly worked out.

We must now turn to the organisation. It is more difficult to speak of this in terms which will apply generally to all sections of Methodists than in the case of doctrine. Theology is practically the same for all branches of Methodism; the usual standards are the four volumes of Wesley's *Sermons* and his *Notes on the New Testament*. But the constitution and government of the Church has occasioned the most serious division within the

parent body itself, and the separate denominations diverge here somewhat widely. It is difficult to secure exact accuracy in a brief account, inasmuch as statements which would be broadly true of Methodists as a whole would in many cases need to be qualified by reference to exceptions. Such a broad statement is all that can here be attempted. It was Wesley's desire as a loyal presbyter of the Church of England to keep his movement in connexion with the Established Church. It was not his aim to create a Church, but a collection of societies within the Church of England. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered to the members of the societies by ordained clergymen, of whom there were several associated with the Wesleys. Ministerial status in the strict sense of the term was not accorded to the preachers of the Connexion. The Connexion, however, was independent of the Church of England in the management of its affairs. Wesley kept the government in his own hands, but united with himself a Conference of Methodist preachers. The logical issue of his movement was inevitably to detach his Connexion from the Anglican Church. His own exclusive High Anglicanism had been so modified by the developments through which he passed, that, reluctant though he was to do anything which would create a breach, it was not possible for him to avoid it. The reading of King's *Inquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity,*

and Worship of the Catholic Church had convinced him that since presbyters and bishops were originally identical, he was himself a Scriptural bishop, hence he ordained Dr. Coke as an American superintendent. Many years before he had rejected the doctrine of apostolic succession; in a letter to his brother Charles, who was greatly distressed by the ordination of Coke, he says: "The uninterrupted succession I know to be a fable which no man ever did or can prove."[1] Still holding the value of the Sacraments, he could no longer attach to them the vital importance he had given them in his High Anglican period. Sacraments could not secure salvation; regeneration did not come through baptism. The full logic of his own position was not worked out by Wesley himself, and some of the offshoots have worked it out more radically than the parent body. Even in his lifetime Wesley ordained a number of his preachers to administer the Sacraments in Scotland and on the mission stations in America. Unwilling to separate from the Church of England or to recognise with his brother the truth of Lord Mansfield's dictum, "Ordination is separation," he foresaw that the rupture would come and made provision for it. The force of circumstances soon after Wesley's death necessitated that the Methodist preachers, who were nearly all unordained laymen from the Anglican point of view, should administer

[1] Tyerman, *loc. cit.* vol. iii. p. 445.

the Sacraments if the societies were not to be deprived of them altogether. The status of fully ordained ministers, possessing valid orders, had therefore to be claimed for them. To them ministerial prerogatives were reserved both in government and in the administration of the Sacraments. The process has been carried in a more radical direction by some of the junior denominations, in which much less ecclesiastical authority is granted to the ministers and in which laymen are allowed to administer the Sacraments. Probably both systems work quite satisfactorily on the whole; but there is a real difference of principle which constitutes one of the most serious difficulties in the way of any scheme for union with the mother Church. At the same time great advances have been made in a democratic direction by the latter, and a much larger place has been given to laymen in the Conference.

The government of the Church, speaking broadly, conforms to the Presbyterian type. It is true that in some very important points the comparison would be misleading, as Dr. Rigg has shown in his work on *Church Organisation*. But the series of courts culminating in the Conference presents a marked similarity to Presbyterianism. A number of individual societies are commonly grouped in a circuit of which there is a superintendent minister who may have one or more colleagues. A number of circuits are grouped in a district. Each district

holds a yearly Synod before Conference. The Conference is the supreme court of the denomination. On other points of the elaborate organisation, quarterly meetings, leaders' meetings, circuit, district, and conferential committees, I must not linger; nor on the detailed differences between the various denominations in the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline.

The class meeting was one of the most distinctive institutions of Methodism. The members were grouped in classes. They met weekly and contributed their class money, a penny a week and a shilling a quarter being the minimum for those who could afford it, towards the expenses of the circuit. They were entrusted to a leader who met them every week for a devotional gathering. The most characteristic feature of these meetings was that each member was supposed to narrate his experience. The early converts were frequently ignorant of the very rudiments of religion, morality, and theology, and the leader was expected to be a spiritual director to all the members entrusted to his care. To call the class meeting the Methodist Confessional, a term which has sometimes been applied to it, would be very misleading. No attempt was made to secure any exhaustive statement of the sins and failings of the members. What they communicated was entirely spontaneous. No absolution was given and no secrecy was observed. What each member had to say was said to all the

other members as well as to the leader. After a member had given his experience, the leader gave such reply as in his discretion he deemed desirable. Once a quarter the minister met the classes to renew the tickets of membership. It is unquestionable that the class meeting in this form served a most useful purpose. It secured that every week a small band of like-minded Christians should enjoy opportunities of spiritual fellowship, of mutual counsel and encouragement. The leader, from his intimate knowledge of the members in his own class, was able to give information and guidance as to the desirabliity of discipline in any particular case and the form which it should assume. It was not, however, without its drawbacks and, perhaps one might even say, perils. The more thoroughly the idea was carried out, the more it was likely to lead to introspection, which might easily become morbid. At the same time this was not the danger which made itself felt in the actual working of the class meeting. It is a mistake to suppose that the class leader was like a spiritual physician taking the religious temperature of his members with a clinical thermometer. The danger was rather that the experiences should be far too general, made up of religious commonplaces, clothed too often in stereotyped phraseology, and varying very little from week to week. With every discount, however, it cannot be denied that the old-fashioned class meeting did a valuable work, and

probably has a future still before it. Many wise and experienced Methodists would deprecate any tampering with it. It is, however, uncongenial to a large and growing multitude of Methodists. They are less and less inclined to say with the Psalmist, "Come, and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul." The reserve about their most sacred experiences, their hopes and fears, their trials and temptations, their slips and their triumphs, makes it impossible for them to speak freely on those things about which they feel most deeply, and they dislike the unreality involved in giving as their experiences what might suit any other member almost as well. It is therefore thought by many to be desirable that the transformation of the class meeting into a gathering for the devotional study of the Bible and other religious subjects should be promoted wherever the members desire it. But occasionally it would be well in these cases that an experience meeting should be held in order that the good in such meetings might be retained without the drawbacks inevitable in a weekly meeting. The vital thing is that, whatever form it assumes, it should provide opportunity for the communion of saints, and check aberrations of individuals, which might easily receive in isolation an excessive development.

On other types of fellowship and experience meetings, such as the band meeting, the prayer

meeting, or the love-feast, I must not linger. But before I leave this aspect of the subject it is well to point out that they must be taken into account in any judgment of Methodist worship. The criticism is sometimes made that the Free Churches are at a disadvantage as compared with Churches which use a form of common prayer, in that they give the people too slight a share in the service. This has a measure of truth when urged against the public services of Methodism, though it must be remembered that many Wesleyan Churches use the Anglican Liturgy in a modified form in their morning services. But no Methodist would admit that the limitation to the public services was justifiable as a basis of criticism. When Methodism is judged as a whole it is certainly the case that its members receive a liberal share in the services. And the training which has been given in the art of easy and correct expression in public speech has been of the utmost value, not only in the service of the Church but also of the State. The novice who manages to put together half a dozen sentences in the class meeting or the prayer meeting moves on by easy gradations, gaining confidence with practice, until he takes the first steps towards the position of an accredited local preacher, from which he may pass into the ministry in the narrower sense of the term. Or, if he does not devote his life to the ministry, he may exercise his gifts in municipal or political affairs.

Inasmuch as Methodists for the most part dislike read sermons, and prefer that the preacher shall be as free as possible from his manuscript, it has been a great advantage that the system has supplied so admirable a training in extempore speech, and also given an opportunity to judge of a man's qualifications for promotion to larger service.

Methodism, then, may claim to be evangelical in the sense that it is non-legalist and non-sacramentarian. It is true that it has generally been vehemently opposed to Antinomianism, and in its recoil from it has not always avoided an unduly legalistic conception of the Christian life. Yet it has magnified the grace of God and its correlative doctrine of salvation not by works but by faith, resting not on human merit but the merit of Christ. An honoured place has commonly been accorded to the Sacraments, and the restriction of the power to administer the Eucharist to the ordained minister has given some colour where this obtains to the charge of sacerdotalism. But Methodism is not sacerdotalist if by this is intended that the minister is a priest who offers a sacrifice in the Eucharist. And a Church which denies baptismal regeneration, and asserts that conversion is indispensable to salvation, and that sanctification comes through faith and the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit, cannot properly be described as sacramentarian. The great Catholic doctrines are firmly held, but with equal firmness those which are more

specifically evangelical. Methodism affirms the boundless love of God in Christ, the universal sweep of His redemption. It offers the Gospel call to every man, and urges him to accept it without delay. It puts the responsibility of decision upon the individual, assures him that his will is free and that his choice is fettered by no irreversible decree which has determined his fate irrespective of his own resolve or action. Repentance, which is the sorrow for sin and the resolute turning from it, and faith, which is the self-renouncing trust in which the soul casts itself on Christ for salvation —these, it proclaims, are the only conditions of salvation. It bids him never rest content without the witness of the Spirit to his sonship. It assures him that sin is no hateful necessity of his earthly condition, that his complete sanctification is obtainable in this life. But it utters also the stern note of warning in that it makes this life a probation charged with infinite issues and fixing his eternal destiny. It is other-worldly in the sense that in its judgment the temporal sinks into insignificance in comparison with the eternal. And yet it does not make the bliss of heaven an excuse for the misery of earth, nor drug with religious anæsthetics its indignation at injustice or its sensitiveness to human pain. It has not identified religion with philanthropy, but it has been eminent for its humanitarian temper and abounding good works. It has sought, not always perhaps with

success, to combine inner illumination with objective authority. Intensely individualistic, it has been also intensely social. It has linked its members into a close brotherhood, sought to press all into its great mission and make them contribute to mutual edification. It has learnt much from other branches of the Church, and many of its most precious truths it holds in common with them. But I think it will be granted not only that it has accomplished by the grace of God a stupendous task, but that it has created its own typical experience, developed its characteristic institutions, and formulated its own presentation of Christian theology. Its wisest friends will claim no more for it than that it is a legitimate form of Christianity, and has had throughout its history manifest and abundant tokens of the Divine approval. Justice will be content with no less. And while the Methodist rejoices to recognise that other branches of the Church have an equal legitimacy with his own, he believes that in that final synthesis which is larger than all and will embrace all, some elements, and those not the least precious, will form the contribution of Methodism.

INDEX

Printed by Morrison & Gibb Limited, *Edinburgh*

Date Due